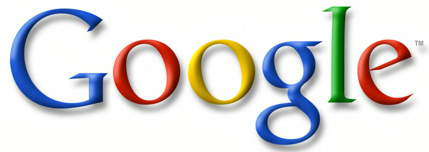

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ME AND MYN.

CHAPTER I

"SNUB NOSE!"

MYN and I began our collections in old written copy-books, mixed small-hand and half-text. The small-hand pages informed us that "Honesty is the best Policy," while the half-text suggested "Honour among Thieves," a maxim certainly worthy of the attention of stamp-collectors. It was chiefly "in the breach," however, that those time-worn *dicta* were honoured at East Dene High School. It was generally called Old Currycomb's—Curry, LL.D., being the name and style of our revered preceptor. So far as us boys were concerned, Old Currycomb's Spartan methods made no mistake as to the appropriate seat of penitential observance.

This was a good while ago, you know, before many people made collections of stamps, and when the boy who collected crests or hair-oil bottle capsules was thought just as much of a scientist as Phillips—or even Me and Myn.

But now I must tell you who we are, Myn and I. We called ourselves "Me and Myn," because—well, I won't tell you that just yet, but it wasn't because we couldn't speak grammatically. For Myn

took the first prize in Grammar in the Sixth at Old Currycomb's, which would have been mine if I hadn't let her. I got second, though.

You see, our High School was one of the nice new patent sort, where both boys and girls, over fourteen, go to the same school and have the same lessons. Of course, we had different playgrounds, the boys and the girls. And we sat, one lot on one side of the schoolroom and t'other lot at the other, with the master's desk bang in the middle. A fat lot of good that did.

We communicated with paper pellets or darts, winged V-shaped. And when old Currycomb's back was turned, my! it was like a nice snow-storm—pretty thick, I bet you. Once the Inspector poked in his nose and he got it—warm. So did we—next day.

Myn and me got on all right after a while, but at first I hated her. I said she had a snub nose, and was stuck up, both of which were true. She remarked that I was a "horrid freckled boy," and that she "abhorred me." So I told her she couldn't spell "abhorred," and that shut her up pretty quick. She threw a golf ball at me (a miss, of course). Then when I annexed the ball, she went and told her dearest friend (for that week), a girl named Eva Dacre, that I was the nastiest, horridest, most insufferable boy in the school.

I didn't go about abusing her. I'm not a girl. But I *did* say to Jo Turner, who likes running messages for me, that if he as much as winked at Millicent Sykes or Eva Dacre, I would put his head under the pump. He said, "*I* don't want to speak

to girls!"—with a sort of sneer, which showed he meant me. So I licked him for his cheek, and to teach him his place. Jo's business was not to be "smarty," but to keep his head shut and run errands, also to agree with me.

You see I was the biggest boy in school—at least I could lick any other—for old Peter Sillars, whose other name was "Hippo," did not count. My name is Sam Brown, and I learnt fighting by having to lick boys who called me "Sammy," and "Samivil," and especially one Scotch draper's boy who called me "Sammle." That was a lovely fight behind the gym, and the senior pupil teacher called time. They had pupil teachers then. I was afterwards one myself. I think Scotty really won, but he was so mauled that he never called me anything but "Sam" after that, which was O.K. And he sneaked a lot of quite good stamps off his father's old letters for me—early Danish and lovely Oldenburgs. In addition to his regular trade, "swatches" of gay dress-goods, old Scotty sold butter and things that came from these parts. Pa Scotty was a regular Jew, but the stamps were all right, and it was very decent of Sandy, considering the time it took for his nose to grow straight again.

My father was just head porter at East Dene station, and because of that I got lovely rides on shunting engines on the sly. But father couldn't do much in the way of getting me stamps, which was what I mainly cared about.

Lessons—oh, gravy! Lessons!—Old Currycomb gave us loads of lessons, but as I had a good memory (and could see an open book farther than any boy in

the Sixth) they were never any particular trouble to me. But stamps!—my, that warmed my heart. I hope you won't tell anybody, but I went into our backyard behind the coal-house and *cried* when I got my first three-cornered Cape. "Molly Coddle," says you—and that shows you know nothing about it. It was kind of *holy*.

For you see stamps are not like anything else—except (but this I found out ever so long after) making love to a girl you are awfully fond of. Stamps make your heart go *ker-flump* just the same way. Once I saw a "Reunion" with the right curls and as black as sin. And I looked about for a hammer to slay the man that had it. He was not worthy of such a treasure—a big fellow with a black beard. It was like your very nicest girl marrying somebody that was just beastly rich. I wanted to kill him for quite a while. But that time I couldn't, for we were not in a thick wood. And besides, you always get found out any way. And hanging's not nice. Jo and I tried it one day on an awful swell drop in a new house his father (who is a contractor) was building up Ash Lane. I was the hangman, and the trouble I had to bring that fool Jo round again, nobody would believe. He went black in the face. And I had warned him beforehand that it was only fun. Jo is so inconsiderate. After he was well I licked him for frightening me.

But of course all this was when I was young and silly, and before I knew about stamps. Still, I remembered that hanging frost, and so didn't kill the man who had the black "Reunion." I thought how Jo had kicked about and gasped, though the ass had his hands free all the time. No, I shan't get

hung for keeps if I can help it—at least, not unless for a whopping big collection—squares of four, maybe, all in mint condition. Then—well, I hope nobody will go tempting a fellow.

But anyway, that's the way you feel about stamps —that is, if you care at all.

And Myn! Well, Millicent Sykes was her name, and her father no end of a swell. He did all the foreign correspondence for old Caleb Grandison & Co.—the biggest and the richest firm in East Dene —ship-owners, ship-brokers, ship-builders—everything about ships, and as rich as sin.

But he was a Radical, you see—that is, Myn's dad —and because of that he had quarrelled with his brother, who was no end of a big pot down in Yorkshire, and as proud as our tom-cat with a Union Jack hoisted at its mizzen, as we did on Pretoria Day.

His name was Philip Hallamshire Sykes—no less! I know, because I have had pecks of envelopes addressed to him, all with "personal" or "Private" or something on the corner.

Now though I told Jo not to speak to Myn, and though I knew she went about abusing me, somehow I couldn't help watching her too, more than a bit. She had a green dress with fluffy stuff at the neck and sleeves. And it took a fellow's eye, somehow. It made me mad, first off, that I should be such an ass. But afterwards, when I came to think it all over at nights, I believe I rather liked it. At anyrate, it was something to watch *for*. Also I was a good dart-thrower, and made up a lot with flat white sweets in them—what they called "conversation lozenges," with mottoes printed across them—

stuff silly enough to make you cry—but we knew girls liked it. So I pelted Myn with these till she said she would tell Old Currycomb.

"Tell away!" I put on the next. I licked it clean and then wrote in pencil, and she answered the same way. And that is how we got acquainted —me and Myn.

She was a nice girl—nice to look at, you know with the ripply glancing kind of hair, that never seems tidy and never untidy. And her turn-up nose (it wasn't *very* much turn-up, you know) gave her a nice, funny, pretty, impudent look that was almost as jolly to look at as a stamp. It gave you the same feeling, you know. At least it did me—only of course not so much so.

But it was when I first heard that her father got wads and wads of foreign stamps every day of his life, up at his office in Caleb Grandison's, that I made up my mind about Myn. After that there was only one girl in the school worth speaking to, and that was Myn Sykes! So I made up to her, giving her flowers—sneaked out of the public gardens (my father being a ratepayer, they were as much his as anybody's)—and candy, which I had to buy— worse luck! So I did not often give her candy. But I did difficult gym tricks and tripped up boys, so that she could admire me.

After a while of this I worked it round so that I could hint about the stamps, and I tell you I got a facer. Well, rather!

I suggested meek as a cat looking in a milk-house door, that Myn might get me some of the stamps her father had on his letters.

"Don't you wish you may get them?" she said. "I collect myself!"

And that, mind you, after I had dodged the park bobby twenty times for her old roses, and once got heaved bodily over the railings by a beast of a gardener, besides spending as much as fivepence-halfpenny on candy. That's girls for you. Gratitude! A Junguloo tiger is more grateful. I called her that, and then I turned my back and walked away, very haughty. I had done with girls, for ever and ever. I said so to Jo. But he was jealous, and only said that it served me right! So I batted him for that, which made me feel some better.

Still, after a bit I began rather to respect Myn. Come to think of it, it was just like a boy, cheeking me like that. And for a girl to care about stamps—well, I never thought they had enough sense. Evidently, however, Myn was not going shares in her father's booty as easy as saying "Good-day!" So I had to set to work and think up something better than just asking.

I had been reading some silly novel books, with all about girls and kissing and things in them, and never a word of a "blue Trinidad" or anything really interesting from end to end. I didn't care about those romances. But mother said I wasn't even to smell them. She was Scotch and strict. She called them "novélles," as if it were spelled the French way, and she said they were "paper-backed trash." So, of course, that made me read them every chance I got. So it would any boy. For myself, I preferred *Hop Scotch Academy; or, How Bob Rattler gave it Hot to the Masters.* Bob blew them up one by one, and filled

the Head's canes with electricity, just chock-full, so that he got "what for" when he was all fixed to welt him. That's what I call a book—oh, proper. No girls in that. But, of course, my mother's saying I mustn't, set me on to the Girl Books, and certainly it worked all right. They can't be *all* wrong. For it was through reading that rubbish I got the idea of making up to Myn about her stamps.

I suppose all girls are soft—born that way, maybe, and the worst kind for softness are those who have no brothers to keep them in their places. Myn was that kind—not silly, I don't mean that (as you will find out), but she had no brother till she asked me to be one. She was an "o-o-o-only Cheeeild," as the entertainment reciters say. And quite enough too, her father declared.

But the green novel-book was all right in spots. I got it out of the Public Library owing to helping Will Thorburn, the librarian's son, with his "prep." He was a duffer at Latin prose, and he certified me as over sixteen, so that I could get books on a burgess ticket, whatever that may be. And it went through all right. How was Will to know my age? I might have been sixteen for all he knew. I could lick him, any way. So if the age had been twenty, Will would have certified just the same.

It's a beautiful thing, is Friendship! There's heaps about it in the books of those old Roman fellows, who wrote so as to make boys miserable, swotting up their stuff. Oh, beautiful sentiments, all about friendship! Pecks and pecks! But I would take even money (in apples) that Cicero and Virgil and the other Johnnies had *their* Jo Turners and Will

Thorburns whom they licked and made run messages —just like me.

Well, these green books told a lot about how to suck up to girls, and make them "love" you. Now, I didn't want to be "loved"—not me! But on the other hand, I was dead nuts on loving those stamps that came pouring every morning into Myn's father's office up at old Caleb Grandison's. The bales of letters, and—I nearly wept on the plate-glass window, right in the street, when I saw him chucking envelopes with Sierra Leones and Uruguays and—oh, all sorts, into the big waste-paper basket, as if they were so much dirt.

Then I saw that little towsy-headed sneak Myn come in with her schoolbag, and she kissed him and said, "Can't I help you, father, just to clear away all this mess?" or something like that, for I couldn't quite catch. And she came right to the window where I was and took them right off, holding them so that I could see—half the British Colonies—nice old Perkins Bacon ones (or whatever they are called) —jolly bright ones with hardly any postmarks on them at all, and low values in strips, and squares, and sixes, till—well, I was nearly heaving a paving-stone through the plate-glass.

And all the while her silly old father went scribbling away answering his letters, as if *that* mattered to anybody, and Myn collaring the stamps by the dozen! Then when I begged, by making signs, for two or three, she put out her tongue at me, and pressed her nose up against the pane. After that she printed on it with her finger, writing backwards "Snub Nose," meaning that I had called her that.

And I went away nearly praying she had been a boy. If she had I would have laid for her round the corner, in Paper Alley. But instead I just made up things in poetry about girls, that would make them frizzle, for I meant to be an author, so that I could make heaps of money and buy stamps with the proceeds. You see I had read in *Snip-Bits* how all authors were abominable rich, and you have to be, if you want to collect stamps properly. You just look at the first catalogue that comes your way, if you don't believe me.

CHAPTER II

"HIM THAT WAITS FOR YOU!"

MYN wasn't a softy. Nor me neither, but I couldn't help myself. It was only in the green books about "love" and the things girls like, that I could read how you must start out. Now I didn't believe Myn would like it one bit—not the way they said. But you never can tell. At anyrate I had tried my plan, same as I would with a boy, all except thrashing her, which of course I couldn't do in the circumstances. So I thought I would give the green book way a show, and maybe it would work better than I thought. Jo Turner wouldn't say anything, because the last two times he had to express his opinion I had licked him for it. This came very nearly being cheek, but I let Jo off because it was true, especially as I wanted him to do a message for me.

Yes, a message—a very particular message!

He was to go and take a letter to Myn. I couldn't chuck things about the school any more, for you see in the time that I was turning over in my mind how to get Myn's stamps, I had been made a pupil teacher, and so had to behave more, at least when Old Currycomb was about.

So Jo took a letter to Myn. It was written out very carefully, and was just like one in the Green Book series that was called *Love's Rosy Petals*, which

was, to my mind, the sickest of the lot. This is what I wrote, and I cribbed like fun—Myn would never know :—

"BEAUTIFUL MILLICENT,—Day by day I have watched you pass. Your tread is like the light dandelion down (a whacker—she was nearer ten stone! But no matter). I have lived my life, all unknown and humble, in the sparkle of your eyes, the silken softness of your tresses, and—and (*four meals a day* would have been the truth, but I had to think of something else) the—the sweet tremulous accents of your tongue (which Myn mostly put out at me, *very* tremulously!). Will you meet me at moonlight alone? Friday night would suit just special—the sacred place to be the seat beneath the fragrant hawthorn at the head of your father's garden, and nine o'clock the time.

"I am drawn to write thus to you, fair Millicent, not only by the beauty of your person, but by the intellectual power which I discern in you—especially in the fact that you collect stamps. Let that be the bond and first pledge of our affection. Bring your 'exchanges' with you, and while the may-blossom rains down on our youthful heads, let us exchange our vows—and stamps. I will bring some nobby ones. Honour, I will! You do the same.

"Your affectionate lover till death do us part—or your father finds out—

"(Signed) HIM THAT WAITS FOR YOU."

I read that to Jo, for I thought it no end clever. And indeed I don't think it bad yet for fifteen past, and stealing a razor, jagged like a hand-saw to shave with! Jo would have liked to laugh, but thought better of it. Which was the more comfy for him. He said it was prime, a ripping letter, and he knew he would never be able to write the like. He muttered

something to himself after the last words, but I did not catch it. Neither did he.

Well, Jo was to give the letter to Myn just when she was coming out of the playground—Skipping-rope Yard we called it. Myn came last as she was the biggest there, and then Jo's biz was to slide up and slip the note, folded in a newspaper like a little ship, into her hand. And if spotted doing it, it was of course only a paper boat or a cocked hat, just as you liked. Oh, we were up to a thing or two at East Dene High School.

Jo objected that she would scream blue murder or open it before the other girls—anyway make a fool of him. But I knew better—at least the man that wrote *Love's Rosy Petals* said it would be all right, and you had better believe *he* knew.

He did too. It went through all right. Girls take to having notes shoved at them like truant boys to an orchard of ripe damsons. Her fist shut like a rat-trap on the little ship, and Jo dropped behind with a sigh of relief. His work was over and he had been neither laughed at nor made a fool of. Moreover, I said he had done pretty fair and would not lick him. So Jo was very grateful.

It was Wednesday then and I had two days to wait for Friday night. I had mentioned Friday because I knew Myn's dad would be working late at his special foreign mail that night, and that she would have cadged a rare loot out of the waste-paper basket. So, of course, I hoped she would bring it along.

Now you couldn't really "exchange" properly in the moonlight—stamps, I mean—other things you

may. But it was stamps I was after that journey, particularly some Lagos she had—just plummy they were.

But all the same I determined to do the square thing by Myn,—that is, if she came. Of course she mightn't, after all. She might think it a plant. But then again, Myn was a plucky girl, grit right through, almost like the best sort of boy, yet chock-full of curiosity as only a girl can be.

So I judged on the whole that she would come, if it were a fine night. But would she fetch her exchanges? To be or not to be—that was the question. I could hardly wait. I was all tingly and prickly. I fidgeted hours before. It was a bore having to do the Green Book business with a girl, but after I had had a good squint at her father's mail that day—Colonials and small state Continentals by the bale—well, I felt that what they called "Love's Young Dream" might have something in it after all. I hoped there would be a "Canada twelvepence" in it. Then I would not object to its being "Love's Young Reality." I loved Myn. I felt my pulse—and was sure of it. If it hadn't been for the bother of the rhymes I would have written poetry. But instead I hunted up an old Byron and cribbed some. It began, "Maid of Athens," which was no good, being the wrong address, but I changed it to the name of Myn's father's house, "Maid of Seaview, ere we part——," which went all right. However, I did not send it. And that, as the clergyman says, was all for the best, because I found out afterwards that it was a song, and that Myn herself sang it at church social evenings, which would have been a rare give-

away for me. Jo told me and never grinned. I was watching him.

Friday night came, and it should have been moonlight—"Luna riding in her highest heaven," and all the rest of it. Only she wasn't, so far as we could see. It was a raw, damp, foggy sort of night, and Jo and me waited behind the cowshed about two hundred yards from the top of Pa Sykes's garden. Jo had sneaked up there in the daytime, pretending he was hunting for a lost ball in Old Maid Easton's garden, and had found out that there was a place through which you could crawl without getting very much scratched.

I had got the very cream and pick of my stamp collection with me, all set out nice on a sheet of cardboard that shut up into three leaves like a fire-screen. There was a lovely "Columbus Landing" and a ninety-cent Lincoln, some proper Prince Edward Islands, and rare Newfoundland Seals—the first handsome ones, both brown and black, so different from the mean-looking seals they have nowadays.

I once asked a Newfoundland boy at our school why they had changed the pattern. And he said because really their seals didn't have forepaws like Landseer's lions in Trafalgar Square, which I had seen once on a Whit-Monday trip. I went up afterwards to the Zoo, and it was so. Only it certainly took the Newfoundlanders no end of a time to find it out. I just wish I had thought of that in time to tell him so. He was a cocky sort of cod-fish, and thought we were fools not to have wooden houses that burned down every five years, so as to get rich on the insurance.

But anyway, I had got together a prime lot, all the best I had—and I hadn't many. I was playing the game square—never trying to cheat as if Myn had been a boy, but solid and upright as a frozen pump. Jo said I was a fool. I kept this in mind—for it would be a useful thing to pound him for after, in case I wanted to pound *somebody*.

The clock on the town hall, away down in East Dene, struck nine. It was pretty dark, and I slunk along under the hedge, for fear of Old Maid Easton's bull-dog, which was friendly enough with me by daylight, but not to be trusted behind you after dark. I felt my breast under my waistcoat, not to still the beating of my heart—oh no—but to see if I had got my little cardboard of stamps with the elastic band round it.

Then I hunted for Jo Turner's famous hole in the hedge. It was not to be found anywhere. I searched and searched, and at last I did come on a place where a pretty lean weasel might possibly have got through. So at the expense of making myself a regular pin-cushion, I wormed a way into Old Sykes's garden. There was a kind of sunk fence, too, so the hole was jolly high up and difficult. But I got there at last, and took out all the thorns that had bigger prongs than a skewer. The rest I couldn't worry with at present. I was too variously prickly. Besides I had "Love's Young Dream" to think of, and also the speeches out of the *Rosy Petals* to run over in my mind. It *was* a swot.

I could see right down a long path which led to a back-door in Old Sykes's house. That was the way Myn would come. I went at it while I could.

"*Oh, heart's dear perfume—centre round which revolves all earth's worthiest, how I love thee.* Confound that prickle down the back of my collar. I can't get at it from the top. Oh, hang it, suppose she was to come now, just when I've forgotten all that rot! It would be just like her!

"*I have watched thee from afar as the shipwrecked mariner, upon lonely seas, catches sight of the fair star that—that*—dash it, I hope to goodness she doesn't ask me to sit down. I am positively like a hedgehog with his prickles turned in!"

Then I saw the door at the end of the walk open a bit. It went to again—very nearly but not quite—as if somebody were looking through, which was all right. I knew Myn would take every precaution.

Then *dunt-dunt!* My heart, or whatever is the thing that bumps inside a fellow, nearly jolted me up in the air all of a sudden. It felt hot and sickly in Sykes's garden. If I could have found Jo's hole I would have gone through it, yes, if all the thorns had been basting needles, but I was too late. *She was coming*, and I might just as well never have set eyes on that beastly green novel book. Not a word could I remember. There she was quite close to me, wrapped in a cloak, and carrying something. I tried to speak, but only made a funny noise in my throat, like a trombone that somebody has poured syrup into.

But that bundle under her arm restored me. I knew what it was. Had I not seen them in old Sykes's office that very morning, as he pitched them like so much dirt into the waste-paper basket—ignorant old worm! They were Central Americans, stamps we thought no end of them, because, you see,

hardly anybody had friends there—except old Sykes. And he only because the people who lived there wrote to him to say that owing to volcanic outbursts they could not pay Caleb Grandison's accounts at the proper time. And they put pictures of volcanoes on the stamps to show that they were speaking the truth. And there were all sorts of Portuguese Colonies and funny Spanish ones where they still used Isabella's head, and, as like as not, Sydney views from some back-block post-office where they had been lying hid up since the flood. Oh—I knew what that bundle contained. And it brought me to myself quicker than sal volatile or a can of water in the face. I began the stuff out of the green drill-book.

"*Fairest and dearest of girls, I have watched thee from afar as—as the fellow in a ship—watches—watches—something or other——*"

"*Glug—glug—glug!*"

I knew that sound. I heard it often enough in school. It was somebody laughing and trying not to.

But the funny thing was that it did not sound like Myn Sykes's laugh. Still, I had my eye on that thick bundle, which even in the dark I could see was done up in one of her father's envelopes. If only I could get hold of that I didn't much care. So I cut the *Rosy Petals'* twaddle and got down to business.

I told Myn my name (as if she didn't know it already, and how I—no, I couldn't get that out . . . quite. To say the words (which weren't true, anyway) made a big dry oatmealy lump in my throat the size of a hen's egg. If it had only been to say that I loved her stamps, now—but I daren't quite say that just then. And so I scorned to tell a lie, same

as George Washington. Perhaps because we knew that neither Myn nor George's father would have believed us—Myn wouldn't anyway. I didn't know Old Mr Washington.

So I gave her my folded pasteboard with the rare stamps on it, telling her as I did so how beautiful she looked. (I couldn't see anything under the hood of her cloak, and everything was as black as my hat anyway.) And I told her how it was "a first interchange of love tokens—to show that she loved me and I loved her."

"*Glug, glug, glug!*"

It sounded like water out of a narrow-necked bottle. But by this time I had my hands on the big envelope of stamps, rare and fat it was. Myn might laugh as much as she liked. And I was so interested and grateful that I even pushed up her hood and was just going to—yes, I was—didn't I tell you I had seen the stamps! Then the hood fell back and the moon pushed out, and I got a resounding cuff on the side of the head from Biddy Balmer, the Sykes's Irish cook-maid. She had a hand like a policeman's boot—No. 13 or thereabout.

"That'll larn ye, ye forlorn pesterin' bog-trotter ye!" she cried, coming at me. But somehow the next moment I was in Old Maid Easton's garden with her "Bully" tearing after me, fairly grunting with rage. He nearly had me at the corner of the cowshed, but Jo was there all ready, and pulled me through. I got "Bully" on the front teeth with my heel, which was always something.

But all the while we could hear that abominable she-Paddy laughing and calling out "*Fairest and dearest of girls*," and asking "How I was off for

stamps?" and then wanting to know "if I wouldn't come back and give her some more of my agreeable conversation!"

But I hugged the big envelope, and was pretty content, especially as Miss Easton's Bully was barking outside fit to raise the town. So Jo and me stayed in the cowshed, where we lit the candle and set it among the hay for safety. Then I opened the big envelope. Yes, there they were, the very envelopes I had seen, all sealed over with foreign seals, loads of wax, red and blue and black. They made my mouth water.

But on turning the letters over, every identical stamp had been steamed off! Yes, every one! Even a common British "red penny" had been scratched off with somebody's finger-nail, leaving just enough for you to see what it had been.

There's girls for you! And then to think of my Newfoundland Seals and the ninety-cent Lincoln as good as new. I hadn't even the heart to whop Jo, but I made him draw blood with one of the biggest prickles out of my arm, and write a solemn agreement in blood, which we signed. This is the document, which I think pretty good to be written like that was, with a candle set among the hay and sixty pounds of bull-dog trying to charge through the boards of an old shed, which you knew to be rotten as tinder.

"FORASMUCH as all girls are beasts and sneaks, and born deceitful, besides being nasty and dishonourable in all their dealings, we the undersigned, swear and register our oath in blood to have nothing to do with them for ever and ever. Amen! Signed in blood, SAM BROWN.
JOSEPH TURNER."

And then we went home, but never said any prayers that night. For it was no use pretending that we forgave our enemies. For we didn't. Not much. T'other way about. Oh, quite!

CHAPTER III

"YOU, SAM BROWN!"

NEXT day at school I watched Myn out of the corner of my eye, but girls are made so deceiving and brazen that she never even winked. I should have been like a turkey-cock if I had done a thing half as bad. Or if any one had looked at me steady for half a minute, I should have gone scarlet, even supposing I had done nothing at all. That is the worst of being a boy. You can't keep on looking innocent. So you catch it for things you didn't do, just as often as for things you had the rippingest fun out of. It's regular unfair. Because when *you* pretend, they find you out and give it you. When a girl does—oh, things ever so much worse—they say——What is it they say? I came across it in one of those Green Books. Oh, yes—"It is only pretty Fanny's way." I'd Pretty Fanny her! Far as I've seen, "Pretty Fanny's way" is to collar your best stamps and give you the cut envelopes—as that beast Myn had done to me.

Oh, of course it was smart. I'm not saying. But then it was mean too. And I'll tell you why. It was all right sending Biddy Balmer to box my ears. I'm not complaining. Wait till I get Old Miss Easton's garden-hose ten feet behind Biddy when she is not expecting it. But when a chap goes square on

a bargain as if it were with another boy (a bigger boy), I say it's mean of a girl not to play fair, just because she *is* a girl. You can't hammer her. You can't go and be a sneak. And of course it gets out, and everybody laughs at you.

Mostly, that is.

For to do Myn justice, this time it didn't. We heard that Old Maid Easton had had the police to look at the state of her garden. Jo and I went and looked. There were the marks of bootsoles shod with iron driven right down into her pansy-bed to the depth of twenty inches. That was my first jump. I think I must have turned two full somersaults. The other marks grew fainter, and the distances between greater and greater. That was when I got up steam. And so would you with the Old Girl's Bully after you, snorting and showing a set of teeth that hadn't an equal in seven counties.

But Myn never buzzed a word, and she made Biddy hold her tongue too, which must have been pretty hard on Biddy. That is, the she-Paddy never told right out, but when she was doing Old Sykes's windows, she would stop as I went past and strike the attitude of the lonely mariner gazing at the star, till I wished I had never set eyes on that beastly *Love's Rosy Petals* book.

But as for Myn, she never blinked—no, not once. She said it was a fine morning when she saw me next day, and that the new rhubarb in her garden was nearly ready to peel and suck. And she said it looking a fellow straight in the eye, too, like the noble but unfortunate hero in burglar-story books, so as to make everybody believe in him, though he has four

gold watches all with different monograms in his pocket at the time.

It was about this time that I got awfully poor. When speaking I say "awful," but this is writing for print. And this was funny, too, because it was the first time that I began to earn real money of my own —I mean not just running messages and carrying bags from the station. But I was a pupil teacher now, in East Dene High School, and got twelve whole pounds in the year, which of course I had to give to my mother. That was all right. I was living for that. It made me go cold and trembly like a hedgehog's nose, only to think of plunking it into her lap when she wasn't expecting it. It would be all right that—a good bit of all right, too.

But—yes, there was a big "but." Of course I couldn't carry parcels and things now. Old Currycomb wouldn't have allowed it—nor the School Board either for that matter. Then I didn't like to pester mother, and father never thought about a boy of sixteen needing money for candy and things. When he was young, he always said, boys were brought up very different—much harder—and he had had no money till he was twenty-one! Why, then, should I?

The answer to that was, that he had been brought up on his father's farm ten miles from a town and five from a village shop, so there was nothing to buy. He couldn't have spent money if he had had piles. But I didn't tell him that; because father, though as kind as kind could be, is a little hasty, and—well, I didn't often bother father. I like to be considerate to those that love me.

Well, I was poor. It was a blessing in one way that I was "outs" with Myn. For I couldn't have bought her candy anyway. And that was mainly what she thought I was for.

So I had to think of a way of making some money —making it quick too. So I got up a lot of fuss about stamp-collecting when Old Curry was out of the room, and as often as I had one of the lower forms —the upper third or the lower fourth (boys, I mean, girls are no good)—I made their geography or history into a sort of stamp-collecting lesson, and the way I advertised all the stamps I had duplicates of was a caution. It was as good as a *Times'* scheme, every bit.

They listened too. It was a deal more interesting to hear about old Italian state issues and Swiss "cantons" than to be asked what rivers ran into the Caspian, and what were the population and productions of Belgrade.

This made me think of doing up my duplicates, and the other stamps I was not particular about, into books, so that the boys could slip them below the table when Old Currycomb came nosing round. He didn't understand the good I was doing, and how those fellows would love geography all their lives after. Currycomb had no gratitude, and was all for the old way of teaching, which was, "Learn a page by heart, and if you don't you'll be jolly well welted till you do."

But I was all for the new method, which is moral suasion. Of course! And my stamps were really very cheap. I never put long prices on and then came down. No, the boys who could afford bought the twopenny and threepenny ones, and those who

hadn't much would take half a dozen "assorted" at a halfpenny. There was no tick. It did no end of good, teaching them the commercial geography of the world and fitting them to be explorers and lonely mariners, besides which I saved no end of my customers from getting into trouble with Old Currycomb by reporting how hard they worked and what good scholars they were, especially in geography. I never knew till then how it felt to be a real philanthropist.

This was all right for a while, and I coined money. But one day Archie Payne, a boy I could have trusted with a six-cent Liberia—the real genuine, not the one with the disdainful expression on her nose—came to me and said that he had been offered two Newfoundland Seals, brown and black, for sixpence each, and any number of nice Prince Edward Islands for next to nothing.

I asked him where and by whom.

He said that was his secret. I caught him by the collar and said in a gentle manner that it had better be my secret also in two shakes of a rat's tail, or there would not be enough skin left on him to set one leg of a pair of compasses down on. So he told me that my hated rival in the business was no other than Myn—yes, Myn Sykes, and she was underselling me with my own stamps too!

Now I put it to any right-minded boy what he thinks of a girl that would do such a thing. A girl like that is capable of practising mental arithmetic on holidays, committing lots of murders, and coming to a bad end by marrying a schoolmaster. At first I was all for war to the knife, getting hold of Myn,

robbing her by force of her ill-gotten gains, and so forth. But Jo Turner soon showed me that that was no good. He was right. It's no class to thump girls—especially nice ones like Myn. For though she had behaved like a toad to me, I never said, except for a minute or so, perhaps, when I was mad, that Myn wasn't pretty nice. Oh, yes, she was that.

After all, she couldn't help being born a girl—at least, so I suppose. And it all came from that. Girls look at things differently. They cheat like Old Satan at games; even cards, and think it fun. Boys would get hove for one twentieth of what a fellow has to put up with from them. But, as I say, Myn was pretty decent—that is, for a girl!

I own up. Jo was right for once. What I had to do was to circumvent Myn Sykes. The only question was how. I gave myself a headache only with thinking, and lay awake as much as half an hour trying to riddle the thing out. Twenty times I said "I've got it!" and slapped my leg. Then the very next minute I saw it was no go. Curious what a lot of good plans have got holes in them, so that they won't hold water, when at first you think they are as tight as a drum.

So after thinking a long while I made up what I should do. It was lovely and simple, but for success it depended on Myn being really, as I have said, "pretty nice." Otherwise it would go as flat as a punctured tyre, and I be worse off than ever.

So I didn't go in for any books, or buy oranges, or even invest in a new knife that I had been wanting ever so long. I hung on to my money like a cow to the tastiest sheet on a clothes-line, till I had near ten

shillings. Then I resolved to have it out with Myn.

My folk lived in a cottage that was quite near Old Sykes's garden. Indeed, at one part Myn and I could talk over, and as this corner was all sheltered by ivy and green truck, I knocked a brick out, so that we could communicate quiet, like Pyramids and Thirsties, or whatever the two classical spoonies were called.

But of course the wall was too high to climb, without two ladders, one on either side. And so that was the reason I generally went by Old Maid Easton's in spite of the bull-dog. When we were not on speaking terms I shoved in the brick again, and since Myn had done what she did about the stamps, I got it all fixed up with mortar—not real mortar, you know, but only sand and dingy mud out of the puddles.

Now, however, I was determined to have it out with Myn in some public place, the more public the better. Now Old Sykes, being a Rad. (as they called all that weren't church people in East Dene), wore a red tie and believed some thing or other—I don't know what, and I don't think he knew himself! But whatever it was, Old Sykes believed it with all his might, and would never give nobody any rest till they believed just the same as he did. When I grew older I barred Old Sykes because of this, but then I didn't care. Why, I would have believed any single sainted thing for ten minutes at his waste-paper basket on foreign-mail nights—I mean before that little sneak Myn got at it.

You understand that Old Sykes's house wasn't

near Old Sykes's office, which was down in town at Caleb Grandison's, an awful big swell place, where even the office boy made faces at you if you so much as looked inside. It was sweller than a bank, and Caleb paid his people better too, you bet. At any rate, he paid Sykes.

Well, always on Saturdays Caleb Grandison's big gates were shut at one o'clock precisely, and all the people swarmed out—the working men all together in a hubble-bubble; then the middle-aged foremen, clumping along, talking to each other and lighting their briar pipes; then one after the other the young clerks on cycles, and the elder ones with little black bags, pretending that they were taking home awfully important work, which it would ruin the firm to keep waiting.

Last of all, just before Jim Grandison and the "guvner," Myn's father came out. He looked like a lamp-post wrapped tightly up in a black frock-coat, with a glossy black "topper" hat where the glass part would be, and all as straight as if adjusted with a plumb-line. If it hadn't been for his glaring red tie Old Sykes would have looked none so dusty. I told Myn so once, and she said I "had no more idea of proper language than a swine-pig," which of itself was very fair language.

Well, it was rather a solemn sort of thing, this shutting up of Caleb Grandison's for the week, and, of course, Myn had to be there.

"Can I help you with your things, papa?"

The little prunes-and-prisms pretender! As if Mr Hallamshire Sykes would have carried one pen-point done up in paper. Being a Rad., he had to be far

too careful of his dignity, and was too proud, anyway. But Myn met him all the same, just to strut home beside her father. I called her a "show-off-ister," and it made her mad.

That was the time I thought of, and it worked up beautiful.

You see, Old Sykes always went in to get the *Red Review*, a paper for which he paid a whole sixpence, at Thomson's, the bookseller's. It told him how to be a Radical all through the next week; what things to go in for, and what not. Radicals never know unless they are told. How can they? It is always fresh and fresh with them. Now a Conservative, like my father, says things are all right just so. Well, then, let them alone! That's all he cares about, and so he doesn't need any paper at all—only *Church Echoes* to put him to sleep on Sundays, after mother's plum-duff and roast beef, and *that* he gets for nothing from the vicar.

Well, Mr Sykes went into Thomson's, and left Myn looking at the picture-books opened in the window. That was my time. So I marched straight up and said to her, "Well, Myn, how are you? I hear you have some nice stamps to sell—Newfoundlands, two seals; a dozen ripping Prince Edward Islanders, besides the New Brunswickers I saw you passing round the class last Thursday. I say, I'll give you ten shillings, all the money I have, for the lot! Here it is. You can let me have the stamps on Monday at school."

And with that I got away, leaving her staring at the gold half-sovereign in her fist. She would have run after me to make me take it back; to hit me,

too, as hard as she could. Myn was that sort. But her dad was just coming out with the *Red Review* in his hand, and Myn, as mad as "blitz," had to double up her fingers and shove the coin into her skirt pocket, so as not to get caught.

But her father saw better than you would think, out of his old gold-rim goggles (old codgers often do), and he says to Myn, "Millicent dear, what was young Sam Brown giving you?" For he knew me, being one of the new-fangled School Board that my father didn't hold with at all.

I don't know what Myn answered, but I guess she would have got no little silver George Washington hatchet anyhow, like what they give at the Kindergarten schools to the dear little girl who has never, never (*been found out when she*) told a whacker.

Of course Myn may have got off without an absolute "corker," because her father was an old moony chap, all bucked up with being a Radical—a thing no Sykes had been before, and with writing about a score of languages so as to earn his own living, which no Hallamshire had ever dreamed of doing. So as like as not he didn't even listen to what she said.

Only there was Myn stuck with my half-sovereign, the first I ever had, in her hand. She knew I was stony, or nearly. I always was, and she would feel ghastly about taking my money. So what I had to do was clear. Just to keep out of the way careful, and to let it sink in—and sink in—and sink in! "Only that!" quoth the raven, "nothing more." Or words to that effect—I've seen them in a poem somewhere.

The best plan I ever struck with girls is not to fight with them. They can beat you all to bits with their tongues. You can't bully them. But if you are wise you can shut up and let them come round. This makes them so mad that they give themselves away.

So I went down to the old cow-house at the corner of Miss Easton's garden, climbed on the hay, and made a hole in the side between two planks by shoving an old chisel through the rotten wood.

I saw Myn come out at her back door and go right to the corner under the ivy, where the brick was. But it wouldn't come out, because I had shoved the end of the log we cut the firewood on up against it. Father got as many old "sleepers" from the company as we wanted to burn; so we hadn't much to pay for coal. But the "sleepers" were the mischief and all to cut up. I hated doing it like poison—but had to, because father asked every night if I had done enough for mother. And I loved doing my duty and obeying my mother—especially when father made a point of asking whether I did or not. Once, when I was very young, my grandmother said to me, "Young Sam, your father is a good man and loves his only son very much, but don't you fool with him." And I never did—at least, only once. Then after that I resolved never to give any more pain to his affectionate heart. Father was a well-built man, I think I said.

Well, Myn tried to shove out the brick, but of course she couldn't. Then I heard her starting to call me.

"Sam!"

"Sam, I want you!"

"Oh, Sam!" (this was said pleadingly, like when she asked for the best strawberries out of our plot).

Then she began to get cross.

"Sam Brown!"

"You—Sam Brown!"

"Samuel Brown, you nasty, horrid boy. I shall never speak to you again, never in my life—not if it were ever so. So there!"

This tickled me so that I wriggled among the hay with all-overishness. It was just nuts to me. I loved to make Myn mad, especially after her being such a pig to me.

"I'll throw your horrid money into your old garden, if you don't come! Then you'll be sorry!"

"I know you are there—you needn't think I don't see you! Come out, Sam Brown!"

"There, I've thrown it away; you shan't ever get any of the money back. I'll teach you, Sam Brown. You think yourself clever! Yah!"

But though she stopped, and looked about and all round every time, I never stirred, but kept my eye glued to the hole in the hay-shed. I had to bite my hand to keep from laughing out and giving myself away. Myn was so mad. She was just dancing. Myn could be the maddest mad person ever you saw. For though she loved to tease, it just strung her all up to have any one tease her back again. Especially me, for she always thought I was stupid, and that she could turn me round her littlest finger—the end one, I mean.

Of course, I knew that she had only pretended to throw away the half-sov., and that the "it" was only a piece of slate. Besides, it fell quite near, and

I could see as plain as print. So I lay most of that day, though it was Saturday, enjoying myself and watching Myn stamping her foot.

Then she-Paddy came out several times, but Myn sent her to the right-about. The rogues had fallen out. Perhaps now the honest boy (which was me) would get his due. And so, what with the dreamy sough of the afternoon wind and the motes that floated sleepily above the hay, I dropped asleep as sound as a nail in a wall. And the last words I heard were, "You come out, Sam Brown—I see you, Sam Brown! I know you are just doing it to annoy. But don't think that I don't see you!"

However I judged that Myn was wrong. She was speaking the thing that was not. She did not see me, nor even suspicion the old hay-shed, or I wager she would have hopped over pretty quick, if she had torn her dress to shreds. That was the kind Myn was.

Oh, it was a happy day—I never want to see a better. I was so happy I even forgot to smoke the (chocolate) cigarette Jo Turner had given me. So you may guess that I felt good. *Upsee-daisy!* It was a first-chop bully-time fine day!

CHAPTER IV

HOW MYN GOT EVEN

Of course Myn got even. She was sure to. Girls are like pussy-cats in that way, as in lots of others. They go and curl themselves up, and purr! And all the time they are planning out how to get even with you—same as a cat that has been whopped for having a go at a canary-bird! That was Myn all over. Good, consistent child, Myn! You could be quite sure that she would get even with you somehow. Not that *that* would help you much! For what you couldn't tell and never could find out, was *how* she was going to do it. She never schemed twice the same. The plans that girl had! Got them out of old *Family Heralds* and suchlike, I bet. But yet I don't know. Once I lent her *Jack Harkaway's School-days*, and she said he was a muff—besides another word that is spelt with four letters, which has to do with bearing false witness.

Yes, she said those words of Jack Harkaway, the friend of my youth, the records of whose career I used to keep under my bed, in an old tool-chest with a false bottom! Lest I should lose them—or my father find them.

"Well—but!" as Myn used to say, "get on with your apple-cart!" She meant that I was slow at telling a story. She could do it quick—several at a

time, in fact. And you couldn't tell the true ones from the other kind—unless by taking them all to the East Dene Municipal Laboratory for chemical analysis. Even then the fellow wasn't always sure.

Of course I don't mean to say that Myn meant to deceive—oh, no—she was only preparing herself for a successful career as a stamp-dealer! But to the tale—Myn was in possession of the stamps and of my precious half-sovereign. But she hated it. More than that, she was half sorry about the Biddy Balmer business. Not that she wanted to do any Green Book love-making any more than I did. Myn wasn't that sort. There were sillies in the school who would chirrup about "love" like blessed little dicky-birds in the "sweeeet—sweeeeeet spring," and blow you kisses till the cows came home. But Myn Sykes wasn't that sort. Not one single blow. So don't think it, or you won't understand these stories about her and me.

I was coming home from School—the Academy, I beg its pardon—one winter afternoon when I met Old Sykes—Philip Hallamshire, I mean. Now I would as soon have dreamed of speaking to the Mayor on November Show Day as to Old Phil. He was no end of a swell, you see, and as starchy as if he wore lace window-curtains for underclothes. Maybe he did. He walks that way—as if something was scratching the hide off him all over, and he was going to stand it out! And you bet Old Phil would too.

He was coming up the narrow main street at its narrowest part. I was on the other side, and before I could tell what was happening he had crossed the

road and was speaking to me. First off I thought he was going to give me something for myself with his gold-headed cane, so I got ready to dodge.

I need not have troubled. Old Phil Hallamshire had other fish to fry.

"You are Mister Samuel Brown!" he said, very dignified.

In the astonishment of the moment, I denied it.

"Then what *is* your name?" said he. "I understood from my daughter——"

Then all in a moment I got on to it. It was Myn starting to get even. I took off my hat politely—so that I could scratch the back of my head—and answered that my name was indeed Sam Brown, but that at school people did not usually call me Samuel.

I did not add that they had better not. He was Myn's father, and besides carried a cane. It is wrong to speak disrespectfully of those senior to you in years. Remember that, boys!

"And why not 'Samuel'? What is your objection to the name?" Old Phil demanded, making his cane whistle. "It is the name of a great and good man——"

"Oh, yes, I know!" I cried triumphantly: "Weller—Samuel Weller!"

"No, sir," said Old Phil, looking to see if I was poking fun at him—but I wasn't; "Nor yet Samuel the Prophet. But Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose immortal works, sir, you see me carrying underneath my arm."

I had the good sense to say that I would like to read the works of Mr Coleridge, and asked if he had written much. (I thought maybe he contributed to

the local paper, the *East Dene Reformer*, like Philip Hallamshire himself.)

The man of many languages smiled bitterly.

"I suppose, sir, you have heard—just *heard*—of 'The Ancient Mariner'?"

"Oh, poetry!" I cried, with instant relief and the usual scorn. You see, poetry was at a very low ebb at Old Currycomb's—the Doc. made us swot up such a lot of it.

"Yes, *poetry*!" said Old Phil Hallamshire, twirling his cane so that I thought he would be sure to cut my eye out with it the next minute—"that noble art which was cultivated by Milton and Shakespeare, and —ah—Milton—and—yes, Coleridge! Can there be anything nobler?"

I told a whopper, and said there could not be. Stamps are just about a million times finer; but he was Myn's father, and then—*mind that cane*—there is that respect for the aged which I have ever attempted to carry into practice.

My! wasn't I glad I did the next moment, for he went on, "Mr Brown" (I looked round for my father—but he was actually talking to me—yes, calling me "Mister Brown"). He continued, stopping his stick to talk clearly to me, "My daughter Millicent is somewhat backward in classics and mathematics. I am informed that you are a teacher at the academy where she receives her education under the ægis of Dr Curry—an honoured man, sir —yes, a man distinctly and fundamentally to be held in respect——"

I cordially agreed with him.

"But I have inquired, and I find that, as was to be

expected, the Doctor is too busy to undertake private pupils. Now, you are young, but—I hear the best accounts of you, of your zeal and knowledge, your diligence and attention——"

(I wondered who had been pulling his leg—Myn, for a box of toffee !)

But I said "Yessir !" calmly, as if I was in the habit of hearing such praises every day of my life, which was far from being the case. He never thought of asking my father, perhaps because he thought the Dad would be prejudiced. So he was, but not in my favour. From him Phil Hallamshire or anybody else would have heard some home-truths about "Mister Samuel Brown." But he hadn't asked—which did quite well for the present.

"Well, then," said Philip Hallamshire Sykes, "if you can surrender a couple of hours two or three times in the evening for this purpose, I will pay you the usual tariff. My housekeeper, Mrs Threads, will receive you. And Dr Curry, your headmaster, will fix your honorarium !"

"Oh, no, sir," I said, "if you please, I would rather *you* did—I shall be quite pleased with whatever——"

"Very well, then," said the old chap, looking pleased, "we shall not quarrel about that."

I wished that I had dared ask him to make Myn go halves in the stamps that she sneaked out of his waste-paper basket. But I knew I was at what the history book calls "The Parting of the Ways," so I kept my tongue between my teeth. Of course I could not afford to have him going to Old Currycomb, who knew very well that Myn was as good as

I was in math., and "all but" in classics. Myn was a regular weasel at the irregular verbs, while I floundered about like a "hippo." I could give her points in arithmetic and algebra, though—a fact with which I salved my conscience. Also stamps. As to stamps, Myn was as the beasts that perish. She could nail them out of a waste-paper basket, and she could do monkey-tricks—her and Biddy Balmer together. But as to telling the issues of, say, the nineteen centimo Spaniards with all the different Isabella heads—each getting younger as the old daisy got more ancient—why, you might just as well have asked her what was on the other side of the moon.

A good deal rather, indeed—for Myn would have had a shot at that. And nobody would have known whether she was right or wrong!

But how I was decently to take the old fellow's money nearly got me—I mean after the first half-sovereign which was really due to me. There was the stamp business, of course, and Myn would be all the world the better of a course in that. But still I couldn't take ten shillings a week out of Old Phil Hallamshire's pocket for teaching his daughter the difference between a black "Maltese Cross" and a real 1840 V.R.

But after I had turned over in my head all reasonable projects, I ended up by resolving to teach Myn good and square. I could always keep a lesson or two ahead of her. You see Old Currycomb had me up at the school from eight till nine every morning by myself. He came in as sulky as a bear, with some egg dropped on the lapel of his coat. He wired into my mathematics one morning and gave me classics

the next—Tacitus and Versions, it was. Well, I thought I would work like steam. That would please the Doc., give me a lift, besides making me really earn what Old Phil Hallamshire would give me. More than that, it would put Myn into no end of a bait. For I knew just as well as if I had been told, that she had pestered her father into doing this. He was under her thumb anyway. He squirmed, but that is where he was.

Well, I went. I pretended that I knew nothing of the fence, nothing of the brick that even now had our chopping-log against it, nothing of Biddy Balmer, and of course nothing of any such thing as a stolen stamp, or a half-sovereign paid for sheets of Newfoundlanders and Prince Edward Islanders which remained undelivered!

I rang the bell at the Sykes's house. It was on the main street, and of course was very swell compared to ours. They had a maid who wore a cap—that same wretch of a Biddy Balmer—besides the housekeeper that was some kind of a relative and was supposed to look after Myn. Mrs Theodore Threads was her name, and she was as nice and plump and bulgy as a feather-bed set up after filling, and was inclined to nod forward in just the same way over her knitting, when she had a good fire before her.

She stopped in the room with Myn and me, because, I suppose, Old Phil Hallamshire had told her to. But that didn't matter greatly to us.

I surprised Myn, though—you may go into any court of law in the kingdom and take your oath that I did. Well, rather!

I never said a word about stamps. I shook hands with the housekeeper and Myn, I told them the kind of weather it was out of doors, plunked my books down on the table, set a chair for Myn, and announced in a businesslike manner, "Now, Miss Millicent, I think we will begin with a little Tacitus!"

And Myn was so astonished that she did—yes, actually, we got under way. Of course, she had not been expecting this, and we had only one book. But I made her look up every word in the dictionary, and keep her eye skinned for the verbs that old Tacitus has so casual a way of leaving to the imagination. For an hour I worked her like steam, even though the old lady dozed off within the first five minutes, and Myn was all the time trying to get me to talk under my breath.

But whenever she did that I only raised my voice, till I drowned her, and expounded Tacitus till I was like to drop. I made her do the piece twice too. You see it was Old Currycomb's forty lines, and the next day he would be revising. Myn and I revised too.

She got mad. You can't believe how mad—so much so indeed that when I asked her to hand me a version book, she balanced herself on one foot and made a drive with her other at my shin underneath the table.

However, I saw it coming. You always can with a girl, and I'll tell you how. It may be useful. They always bite their bottom lip just when the kick is coming. They can't help it. . . . Never noticed it? Well, just you watch your dear, sweet-

tempered little sister the next time she goes for you. Then you will see I am right.

But Myn had miscalculated. My shin had been there, but when I saw her getting ready to let fly, I stowed it away for safety under my chair. She went a little farther than she had intended to do and—the leg of the table was of fine old carved mahogany, all bumps and bulges. There were some too on Myn's foot.

She bit her lip still more to keep from crying. But the tears fell down with a "*whop*, *whop*" on my Tacitus—only on the cover, which didn't matter. I was afraid for a moment she was going to howl—for it must have hurt like fun. So I took my biggest Pupil Teaching tone, as if I were giving dictation to the Upper Fourth, and at that moment the door opened and in walked Philip Hallamshire Sykes, looking more like a swathed lamp-post than ever. He had just got back from the office and had a cane in his hand.

"Well, so I see you have started?" he said, standing with his back to the fire, while Aunt Threads recovered herself, blinked, and went on mechanically with her knitting. "But—what's that, Millicent? Tears—do I see you in tears? Is Mister Brown too hard a master? Or the verbs too difficult to look out? Come now, little girl, tell me all about it. If you do not care for the lessons, I dare say that Mr Brown and I can arrange to put them off till you are a little older—but it was your own wish, you know!"

"Oh, no, *no*, father, please!" cried Myn, gallantly; "it was only that in reaching for a book *I pushed the table too hard with my foot!*"

Good for Myn! Little hatchet, please! Told the truth and shamed the . . . teacher! She put it mildly, of course, but still she told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! And she never gave me away. She didn't even give herself away, which was more to the purpose.

"Well—well!" said Old Phil, warming all the back of him except the tails of his coat, which he held under his armpits like the Wings of Night in the poem, "I dare say it will soon be better."

"It is better now," said Myn, with suspicious readiness. "Mr Brown is so *very* kind, and *such* a good teacher! I have worked harder to-night than I have for . . . weeks!"

"What are our schools coming to?" demanded Mr Sykes, ardently. "All this is owing to the continuance of an antiquated and pernicious system—you agree with me?"

"Yes, sir!" said I, for I had not the ghost of an idea what he was talking about.

"Tacitus!" murmured Myn under her breath, "oh, you brute!" She referred, I believe and hope, to the historian. I explained that part of our time I proposed to devote, with Mr Sykes's permission, to the study of commercial geography, that science so necessary to all who wished—all who wished (oh, hang—what was Old Curry's phrase?) to take their place in the battle of life.

"Most necessary—most wise," said Philip Hallamshire, the Radical, agitating his *Red Review*. "You have sound ideas, young man. Remarkably so for one so young!"

I was nearly saying "Yessir!" again, and spoiling

things, but I restrained myself, and suggested instead that the study of postage stamps was most valuable in this connection. And I showed him a series of Spanish ones, upon which I lectured learnedly (cribbing from Crockett's famous text-book, *Stamps or Latin Peninsulas in their Historical Relations*).

"Dear me! How interesting!" said Old Phil, "I never before imagined—yes—yes, that will be very good for Millicent!"

But that night, in the pocket of my overcoat (which I had left in the hall) I found ten shillings, *and* my cardboard with the stolen stamps.

CHAPTER V

LOVE AND WAR

MONDAYS, Wednesdays and Fridays were my days at old Hallamshire's. I was not skimped of my time in those years, and Myn and I got on famously. Aunt Threads dozed comfortably, and whether we had a couple of stamp albums or a Latin grammar before us, it was all the same to her, so long as we did not make "an unseemly noise."

We did *not* make unseemly noises. Why should we? We had made it up long ago. Myn had owned that she was sorry—in her own way, that is. She never teased me about the Green Book, or the passages I had got up from it to spout to Biddy Balmer. There was, as I have said, something pretty nice and straight about Myn. She never went back on a fellow. Pestered him—yes. Made his life a burden to him—yes, if she could. But she did not go snooking and tale-telling like some I could name.

This is how we made it up, or something like it.

"Look here, Myn, you have got to learn your little song first thing every night" (that is what I said to her). "I am not going to take your *pater's* money without drilling you for it good. So you had better fall into step just at once."

"But the stamps?" said she, turning her head on me saucy as a little cock-sparrow.

"Oh," said I, "the stamps can keep till I've put you through your facings."

"What would you say," cried Myn, "if I were to tell father that the lessons are not doing me any good?"

"You won't," I said; "you like them too well."

"*Oo-oo-oh!*" she pouted, "you think so, impudence! If it were not for what you tell me about the stamps—do you think I would sit here to have old Latin and mathematics drummed into me—and me nearly as good as you at school?"

"Well, anyway," I said, "you do like them—you can't deny that."

"I can," Myn cried out shamelessly, "I can deny anything! What is the use of being a girl if you can't?"

But I on my side took back the stamps and the half-sovereign without making a fuss, or making her feel mean about it. (She had felt pretty considerable mean the time when I was keeping out of her way!) And every night after we had our lessons done—and I kept her at those like old Currycomb himself—we did stamps. I helped her to arrange her stamp-book, which was a first-rate one, with an inscription, "To my Beloved Daughter Millicent," on the fly-leaf. Myn liked her father awfully, of course, but she didn't much like the inscription, as it went on to say that it was given because of a year's perfect good conduct — a thing which made me chink with laughter only to think of.

So the next thing I knew was that the two leaves which contained the beautiful clerkly handwriting of old Philip Hallamshire had been carefully gummed

all round the edges—and stuck like a new India paper Bible—you know the way.

Then just as we were getting on like several houses a-fire, two things happened, one after the other—one funny and the other not so funny, which together nearly made an end of our stamp-collecting—and, incidentally, of Me, Myn & Co., Ltd., which was the first name we traded under.

We had reckoned with Philip Hallamshire, with Aunt Threads, but we had not thought a bit about Biddy Balmer. We did not see any use why we should, you see. We were not doing Biddy any harm, or for the matter of that, anybody else, either. Again, why should we? We had our stamps.

And if this were only put at the foot or the Decalogue in gold letters, and preached about in churches, it would do no end of good. Something like this:

"WHEN IN DOUBT—COLLECT STAMPS!"

"WHEN IN TEMPTATION—GET OUT YOUR STAMP-BOOK AND FORGET EVERYTHING ELSE!"

"WHEN BAD-TEMPERED AND WANTING TO KICK SOMEBODY—KICK YOUR STAMP-BOOK!"

This may look all wrong at first glance—to talk like that, or to write. But it works out all right. Because when you are at your stamps, you don't get off thinking how nice it would be to do this, that, or the other thing. Right stamp-collectors are always well-behaved. They spend their time usefully, and never get into mischief. Fathers should take a note of that. And if only collectors make a rule to let off their bad temper by batting and kicking their collec-

tion—why, they wouldn't ever do it. It's a real moral thing stamp-collecting—religious even, if you look at it the right way. Some proper sermons could be preached on it too. Lots of boys would go —Myn too!

And if you show these statements and proofs to your father and mother (choosing a good time), very likely they will give you enough to start you off with a ripping guinea packet. Another good way is to be fearfully "rumbustious" for several days during the holidays, till every one in the house is sick tired of you, and then—take up stamps, and reform! Every one will ask how this miracle came about, and ever such a lot of people will take an interest in getting you rare Uruguays and American Exhibition series, Buffaloes and things, each as big as a corn-plaster! You will grow rich and beloved, and be allowed to go out and play whenever you like with the boys (and girls) next door—because they will always "know where Jimmy is."

"He is so devoted to these stamps of his, that he never gets into any mischief!"

That's what the parentals will say about you, and you will have honour in the land—also money to buy tuck.

That is, *mostly*. As for my father—he was very conservative, and if I started a noise in the house, or made mother's life a burden to her (and he knew of it), or if I didn't come home in decent time, he wouldn't write for any selection of rare "Straits Settlements" for me. One solitary Malacca would be my portion, and he would ask me to come down behind the stick-house to receive it.

It was very smooth, very brown, and, by gum, wasn't it supple! I never knew one stamp yield such a lot of fine impressions.

But this is by the way a mere personal experience —and mostly, as I judge, it is not so. Father is a burly, well-set-up man without modern ideas, and prides himself on bringing me up as he had been brought up himself.

Well, he might have succeeded but for Myn—and Biddy Balmer. You see, before I went to teach Myn, she and Biddy had been a lot together. And after—not nearly so much. For the lessons took a good while, and on the nights when I wasn't there, I mostly always left Myn something to do—pottering with the stamps, I mean; doing up the exchanges, pricing them, and so on. I did not mean that she should forget about me.

Well, after a while Biddy, who had never liked me, got as jealous as a hen past laying (and nearly ready to be sold as a spring chicken) is of a pullet that has just been letting all the barnyard know about her first egg.

Jealous! Jealous is no name for it. Biddy would listen at the door, and stop the kitchen clock on purpose to poke her nose into the parlour, pretending to look what o'clock it was, but really spying how close Myn and I had our heads together.

But old Auntie Threads—though she did not mind a button for the mumble of our voices when at work, and to whom "Prince Imperial, Blue Essay" sounded exactly the same as *Omnis Gallia divisa est*—was extremely sensitive to draughts. So she forbade Biddy Balmer to come into the room on any pretext.

Aunt Threads promptly forgot all about it, of course, and as for Myn and Me, we were giving our West Indians a proper "doing over" right from the beginning, and *we* cared nothing about it either.

So Biddy, being obstinate and contrary as a Tipperary hog on its road to the butcher's, never came near the room, and never set Mr Sykes's dinner or anything. He was like all the "Tykes" (which rhymes with Sykes), death on his dinner. Then when he came in wet and tired from the office there was something of a row. Yes, I was there, and I didn't know when I might be asked to leave.

Biddy stood in the doorway, with her short red hands wrapped tightly in her apron, just as some puddings are before being cooked, and she opened the string of the packet of her wrath, and gave us all the benefit of every scrap of its contents.

At the very first word Philip Hallamshire drew himself up. His head went back with a click, and he seemed to be looking at some mean insect—a grub, or something nasty—oh, miles and miles away. I question whether, before she was finished, he could have seen Biddy with a 6.5 Grubb refractor! Oh, he was a regular old gentleman, Phil Hallamshire, though a crank, and neither to hold nor to bind when he got a down on anybody.

But it wasn't on me—not this journey, at any rate.

Biddy Balmer's wrath ran like a water-spout. She foamed and roared. Myn had wheedled her father into getting me for a teacher, it seemed. She herself, Bridget Balmer, had gone to the head of the garden to meet me at her young mistress's request. She

wanted Mr Sykes to know what sort of things went on in his absence. And so forth and so on.

But Philip Hallamshire did not want to hear. Disdaining to speak to a mere retainer, he turned on his relative.

"What have you to say to this, Mrs Threads?" he demanded. Mrs Threads shook all over with excitement and indignation.

"Oh, the evil-tongued woman," she said, shaking futile knitting-needles at Biddy Balmer, "how dare she? The poor young man! Never have I been out of the room for one moment, and they have been at it about Cæsar and $x+y$ and New Grenada till they make my ears buzz with their learning. I call it wonderful!"

Mr Sykes took a note from his pocket, and unolded it very calmly. I knew in a moment it was either my warrant of execution or my patent of nobility.

"I have here," he said slowly, "a report from Dr Curry, in which he informs me that since the middle of last month my daughter's work has been very much better, and that he is very glad to signalise the immense improvement. Now, Mr Brown came on the 13th, if I mistake not! What have you to say to that, woman?"

Biddy Balmer had nothing to say, except to repeat in a bewildered way—"Mister Brown—Mister Brown"—as if still uncertain who was meant.

"Then pack your trunks and be gone!" cried Old Phil. "I will have no tell-tales on my place. Out with you! You have friends in town—you can send them for your boxes in the morning!"

"Indeed I will not move a 'fut,'" cried Biddy, suddenly waking up to the situation. "Not without my wages and my boxes." Old Phil soon arranged the wages by putting his hand into his breeches' pocket, and falling back upon the front door which Biddy in her anger had forgotten to shut, he called loudly on a passing "hand" belonging to Grandison's.

"Send up a cab," he commanded; "the first you meet. Say it's for me. And you" (turning to Biddy) "be ready to quit when it comes."

I thought that I did not want to be the means of losing Biddy her place, so I rose and endeavoured to explain that Biddy had indeed been employed as a means of exchanging stamps, but that——

I might have saved myself the trouble. Old Phil waved me away. "Let me manage my own house," he said haughtily; "any explanation you have to make I will hear after!"

Even Biddy disavowed me.

"Shut your mouth, Sam Brown, you cottage boy!" she said. "The idea—you makin' up to them that lives in two-storied houses."

Now Biddy was going straight down with all her packages to that part of the town near the docks known by the name of "Tipperary the Little," but she hated me like poison—why, I don't really know to this day.

At any rate, she was gone even as we stood there gazing. And Old Phil, having taken off his overcoat in the hall, marched into the sitting-room. To Aunt Threads he said, "Do you think I could have something to eat?"

And to me, "I am sorry, Mr Brown, that you

should have been deranged in your lesson by domestic broils. Pray proceed. This shall not occur again."

Oh, there was something about as fine as they are made under old Phil Hallamshire's waistcoat.

But what came after that did not at all come up to his anticipations of uninterrupted domestic peace. The next maid was a pretty little flash-eyed thing named Maggie. I never knew if she had another name, or if I knew it, I have forgotten.

Biddy had "hated the sight of me." Maggie loved the same landscape—which need have hurt nobody if only she had kept it to herself. But she had had the misfortune to lose a brother exactly like me in early life, and the way she went on about this brother to Myn, and the way she would run like a puss when she heard the knock of that brother's counterfeit presentment, were, to say the least of it, suspicious. At least, Myn thought so. To me she was cold, with a chill frost to which the icy Pole is as a German stove. So I asked what was the matter with her.

"Maggie's brother, and kissing behind doors!" replied Myn, to my utter astonishment. I asked her to explain herself, but instead she became more polar and more cryptic.

"I don't mind having somebody to teach me who has freckles and a large mouth," she said, "but I *won't* have him like Maggie's brother!"

And we were "outs" with one another for two days and three nights, during which time stamps were not once named between us. And when Old Phil brought a lot he had gathered in the office off a late mail, Myn gave them to Maggie, who was laying the cloth, saying that they were for her brother!

This was, I saw at once, far more serious than the other affair. For making real trouble, Biddy was not in it with little innocent-looking Maggie.

I tried to explain (not knowing any better) that it wasn't my fault.

"That's right," cried Myn, "blame it on the girl—and she not here to defend herself."

I said I did not care if she were—ten times over. And in two ticks of the clock Myn had gone to the head of the stairs and called out "Maggie!"

So I was in for my first "explanation between parties."

Myn did not beat about the bush. You see, East Dene was a friendly sort of place in those days, and Maggie, though she came to be maid at Old Phil's, had been a quarter or so at Currycomb's on her own account. So of course Mrs Threads spoke to her like one poor relation asking another for a lump of sugar, and only Old Phil himself as distantly and haughtily as Solomon in all his glory addressing his second-best fly-flapper. But to Myn and me she was just Maggie—though, curiously enough, I forget her other name, and don't like to bother Myn by asking.

"Maggie," demanded Myn, "why do you talk all the time about Sam Brown?"

You can imagine what a fool I looked—*felt*, anyway.

"Because he is so like my brother!" said Maggie, tugging nervously at her apron.

"And that is why you run so quick—quicker even than for the postman—when you hear him knock?"

"Yes," said Maggie, glancing from the toe of her

indoor slipper to my face to observe the fraternal likeness, "that is the reason. I was fond of my brother."

"Well," said Myn, "you listen to me, Maggie (she said her name, too, but I have forgotten it). "I had a brother too — an uglier, bigger-mouthed, freckleder brother than you. And so long as you are in this house, *I* am going to open the door to Sam Brown!"

Maggie said that it was her place so to do.

Myn said that Maggie had her orders, but added, as a soother, that she had taken a vow to do it in memory of her long-lost brother. Then she asked Maggie if she quite understood.

And Maggie looked at Myn, and Myn looked at Maggie. It was the elder who knuckled down. And Maggie said that she understood. She added (so as to retire with flying colours, or something like them), that she had almost forgotten about her brother anyway, and would much rather open the area door for Willie Snapps, the baker's son!

CHAPTER VI

THE CROWD ABOUT THE DOOR

One night, as I was going down the street home, thinking on a new weeding out that my Peruvians needed, and estimating the length of time it would need to steam off the stamp-edging which we used for hinges in those remote days, I saw a crowd about our door. I broke into a run, a cold sweat on my brow, and my heart thumping with fear—almost the first real fear I had known.

The people made room for me to pass in, and, as I went up the steps, I was informed of what awaited me, as gently as the East Deners knew how. "Eh, the poor lad—he's lost his faither!" "Yon's a chap that'll sleep in an orphant's bed this nicht!" "Eh, aye, he fell down and never spoke again!"

I rushed upstairs and made direct for my father's room. But Dr Salveson, whom I knew, though he lived across the water at Thorsby—a tall young man who was a great friend of my father's—caught me by the coat-tails as I passed.

"Sam," he said, "you'll have to help me with your mother!"

"My father—my father!" I said, in a voice that seemed curiously far away, even to myself.

Dr Salveson nodded and put his arm about my shoulder. They are good sorts, mostly, doctors.

You don't find many better—all except the young ones who look as if they would like to cut you up alive on the spot. Dr Salveson wasn't that kind, though he had married what they call for love—that is, love and no stamp collection—the only thing I can imagine a fellow selling his liberty for.

To me he said—oh, so very quietly, "Sam, you are the head of the house now. Your father has had an accident——"

"He is dead—I heard them say it outside!"

"The brutes!" I heard him mutter. Then, with a sigh, "Well, perhaps it is better!"

He looked at me a while.

"You are a man," he said, with his hand still about my shoulders. "Yes, I thought so. Well, yes, I think I can trust you to go up to your mother."

. . . . .

Now, I'm not going to write more about it than that. But just because people who read these stories might want to know how everything came about—well, I will put in this: Myn came over that night, and sat with mother, while I made bolts out into the backyard to cry. Then I rubbed up my eyes at the water-tap on the coarse towel to dry everything right again, and so be able to go into the darkened room.

About nine o'clock there came a knock at the door. I went. I thought, of course, it would be the funeral man or something horrid, and that I must keep him away from mother. But instead it was Old Phil Sykes, Myn's father—yes, Phil himself.

"I am sorry to hear about your father, Mr Brown,"

he said. "I hope you will allow me to presume on our mutual position to offer any assistance in my power. Thank you, I *will* come in."

He found Myn holding my mother's hand, which seemed to astonish him somewhat, for he stopped short as if he had knocked his shin against a bar. Then he bowed to mother, but took no notice of Myn whatever—no more than if she had been a block.

I don't remember what he said to mother, and I wouldn't put it down if I knew. For on these occasions it doesn't matter so much what any one says. That can't help. It's the way they say it. And you had better believe that in that old Phil's was about as right as they are made. Now I'll trounce every fellow who calls him Old Sarsaparilla—though he's as big as a house—so that's fair warning. Old Phil Hallamshire is a brick, and no mistake.

When I went back to begin my lessons with Myn, he took me into the study, all full of papers he had brought home from Grandison's, also books and copying-things. I thought he was going to say that Myn was to have no more lessons, and that I couldn't have the ten shillings a week any more. This made me a little sick.

That is one way that it happens in story-books. The t'other way is when the "*nobil*" old man, gently shaking his silvern locks, and with tears in his eyes, says, "I have but one daughter—take her, and with her all that I possess!"

But this last is uncommon about East Dene. The older and more silvern-haired they are, the tighter they hang on to the dollars.

Of course I never thought Phil Hallamshire would be such a fool. Besides, if he had given me his daughter, I shouldn't have known what to do with her. Girls are all right once in a while, but to have them eternally tagging after a fellow—that's where the trouble begins — bound to! No chap can help it.

No, old Phil Hallamshire only sat and twiddled a paper-knife and asked me about what I was going to do, and what my father had left.

"I'm not asking you, Mr Brown, out of any reason of curiosity," he said, slapping his knee with the paper-cutter as if his only thought were to hit the fold of his trouser every time exactly, "but I should be glad to give you the benefit of a not inconsiderable experience."

I told him that as far as I knew my father had his life insured for about four hundred pounds, and that he had a hundred in the bank. Mother and he called it "the nest-egg," you see, and thought that I did not know about it. Parents always have secrets of that kind, and think their cubs are "softs" that can't pick up anything from a hint.

So old Phil sat there and beat his knee softly, and said *Hum-m-m.* And in the next room I could hear Myn also humming over the ten lines of Ovid I had given her to get by heart. And the two of them went bumbling on like a couple of bluebottles holding an election meeting in a water-carafe. Of course I ought to have been thinking of something very different, but queer things come up and "disturb your mind," as the vicar says, when you should be thinking of solemn things. I knew of one fellow who

thought of gooseberry season in his aunt's garden all the time he was getting one of old Currycomb's best weltings! His name was Smith One. He thought special of some silver-grey goosegogs, very thin-skinned and juicy, that melted in his mouth. And he says that it helped him such a lot, that he never minded about the cane at all. But he was a pretty tough chap, anyway—a Colonial, who knew what a gum tree was, which precious few fellows do.

But Old Phil only hummed and made queer gurry-wurry, dog-fighting noises in his throat. Then he said, "Mr Brown, I am exceedingly satisfied with the progress that my daughter is making under your tuition, and also with the reports from Dr Curry, your headmaster. They are very different from what they were before. I have to ask you, Mr Brown, to accept henceforward of the honorarium of fifteen shillings a week!"

"No, sir," said I, "really you are overpaying me already!"

"Permit me to be the best judge of that!" said old Phil, with the dignity of an H.R.H. "I shall have to request you to remain an hour longer in the evenings, in which case I may be able to supervise part of your work—perhaps even profit by it myself. And—yes—yes—we shall see, Mr Brown. Good night, Mr Brown!"

Myn had slipped out, and was waiting for me just round the corner. She wanted to say how dreadfully sorry she was about father. But she couldn't—no more than a boy could. And I respected her for that. It's pretty fine of a girl not to gas when she gets the chance, and a fellow can only say, "Thank

you—jolly kind of you!" or some fool thing like that.

But all that Myn said was, "Did you get your rise?"

"Yes," I answered. "I suppose it was *your* doing."

"Not it," she said; "it was a clean snick right off the governor's own bat. You don't know the old 'gov.' yet. Nobody does, exceptin' me. And he's surprising me all the time—yes, even me!"

Then she began to say that of course fifteen bob wasn't like father's wage. But that it would help along till I got more money for my pupil-teaching; and that her father really wanted to do it. He was dead set on his only daughter having a good education —"*Poor Old Dad!*" She finished up sharp with that, as if I couldn't teach her anything. Then I said, prompt, that if she did not think I was giving her the worth of her father's money I would resign.

"Resign your grandmother!" she said, speaking that way to cheer me up. "Of course you do far more for me than ever you did for old Currycomb. I believe you crib it out of a book before you come!"

This was pretty near the mark, but I wasn't going to give myself away. So I just told Myn that if she found anything I had told her to be "out" I would give her my black Mulready envelope! That was "talking," and shut her up on that lay.

Then she said that she had been thinking of something else that we could do together in the money-making way. And I told Myn that if it were sneaking

more of her father's money I would not take a farthing. It was bad enough as it was. Myn said that it wasn't, and so we separated like that—just waving a hand and saying "So long!" like the right kind of boys.

. . . . .

Well, I pass over a good while. Father had not left so very much, and it was a bit before we got even that settled. So mother and I had to live on in the old cottage—which, luckily, was our own — with what I managed to make.

I don't say that we lived fat, mother and I. But then mother, being Scotch, was a capital manager; and she made fifteen shillings go a long way. What I got for pupil-teaching at the school wasn't very much, and most of it had to go for taxes, for boots for me, and everything like that. You see, I had to have a school suit and a best suit, or the School Board would not have had me. It was pretty hard all round. But it makes a fellow feel ever so good inside to think that after all he could do even that for his mother.

Then Myn came at me with another idea, like a bull at a fence. We had joined our stamp collections and sold our surplus, buying in and selling out—the first as cheap and the second as dear as possible. Well, now, Myn wanted to sell our joint collections! Think of that! The goose that laid the golden egg, roasted and stuffed with onions, was nothing to that! I refused promptly. I was willing to work the hands off my wrists for mother, but I thought that we could do better than sell our stamps.

We had two or three sources of supply—the main

one being, of course, old Phil's waste-paper basket. Also, for purchasing purposes, we kept a sixpence a week out of Myn's pocket-money. She got a shilling, but sometimes had strange, unholy desires for ribbons of different colours for her neck and hair. Girls had them then, and I was never quite able to break her of the habit. But there was always the sixpence, and with it we bought stamps from the scholars who had any worth buying—sometimes half a dozen for a penny. We had rum crazes in the school, and some of them were ever so helpful to us.

Whenever there was a run on Grandison's offices, from some foreign country—orders pouring in to ship beans to Fernando Poo by such and such a steamer—we nailed all the stamps. That of course. Then we got up a fuss about the country. I gave geography lessons to every class upon Fernando Poo, till I was sick of the name—there were few inspectors and schedules then, and a teacher could do pretty much as he liked. That is why they turned out so much better scholars. There were no exams.—or hardly any. But we both felt, Myn and I, that there was much bigger game to fly at than this. I thought of having a stamp exhibition with admission sixpence for grown-ups and a penny for children—money returned on going out if the value of three times the entry money had been bought. For of course all the stamps were ours.

Myn thought this might be all right, after a while, but—we must sweep the country clean first.

"There are two or three hoards, any one of which could swamp us," she argued.

"Pshaw—old letters!" I cried. "Haven't we

had every kid in the school searching for them till the dust on their fingers is an inch thick, and their copybooks are a shame to be seen? And what have we got out of it? Some old black Victorias, a few flat-faced Americans all faded, and—but that was certainly good—one Sydney View!"

"I don't mean kids," said Myn; "I agree with you about them. We must get permission to have a hunt ourselves. What do you say to Grandison's? Think of that!"

"Grandison's!" I cried. "Look at your father—he chucks every envelope into the waste-paper basket, and has been doing so for years and years. Oh, why hadn't you an elder sister?"

At this Myn sat up at once, very dignified. She regarded me coldly.

"I suppose if I had had an elder sister, you would have liked her better than me!"

I tried to soothe her. You have to be so beastly careful with a girl.

I said, "No, not unless she had more old stamps!"

Then Myn began to cry, and said that she would never care about any boy again. They were all alike.

"Ha!" said I, snatching at the chance to put her in the wrong, "so you have tried others before!"

"No, I haven't," cried Myn, crimsoning; "I never was friends with a boy before in all my life——"

"Who was, then?"

"Eva Dacre!" she said, "if you want to know. She is much prettier than I am—nicer too. And *she* told me! So there! She wouldn't look at you!"

But Myn did not get very waxy this time—because, I suppose, she had something on her mind.

"Well," she said, "it really doesn't matter. The main thing is that we must make more money——"

"Why?"

"Because you need it—or your mother does—and I'm going to show you how to get it! Before my father came, and for many years after, they kept the letters at Grandison's. Because, you see, the stamp was put on the letter itself, just stamped and folded, nothing more—no envelope—that's quite a recent thing."

"You never dare!"

"*I daren't?*"

Myn was mad now, mad as hops.

"I tell you I shall go and see Mr Grandison himself, and get leave to go over all the old letters of the firm and lift the stamps."

"Never!"

"Yes, I will," said Myn; "it will be the biggest thing yet. And then when we get those and some more I have had a hint about—why, we can really begin to make some money. But let us lift the stamps first, before anybody else gets after them. If they get in ahead of us, they can undersell us, and blow us sky-high!"

"They shan't blow us sky-high. Eh, Myn?"

"Well, hardly!"

"I say, Myn."

"Well, Sam Brown?"

"I think you are the greatest girl that ever was—as good as a boy—nearly!"

"Would *you* go and face old Grandison?"

"No, Myn—not much!"

"Then I think I am better than most of the boys I know," said Myn, conclusively, "for you are pretty fair yourself, you know, Sam! *For* a boy, that is."

CHAPTER VII

OUR FIRST WINDFALL

Yes, it was a momentous interview. *I* couldn't have done it for beans! But girls have cheek for anything. Funny thing—in story-books like Walter Scott's, and old books generally, the girls of that time fainted at the sight of a man coming round the corner rather sharper than ordinary; but now they have the nerve of lion-tamers. At least Myn has: and she went up into the Crow's Nest that old Grandison had made to overlook his yard, as if she were going to tea with her Aunt Sally; she hasn't any, but that doesn't matter.

I waited outside. It was a holiday, of course, or we couldn't have got off. There was a kind of hole in the yard wall, with a door where some of the bigwigs could enter—if they had keys, that is. And Myn sneaked her father's. He did not often go to the works, you see, but stayed at Grandison's office down in the town: the place where we could see through the window into the waste-paper basket.

I waited in the lane outside the wall guiltily, like a cad trying to sneak a dandy-looking kit-bag at a railway station. The policeman on the beat passed two or three times, and each time he looked harder at me. But I had on my school suit, and a white

shirt with stand-up collar and green tie, so he did not proceed to extremities.

My! it was a long time. I almost thought Myn was going to fetch some of the stamps with her. And when she came out at last, with an old man attached to a white beard to show her to the door, I could hardly keep from howling with joy.

She had a book in her hand.

It wasn't a thick book. Indeed it was pretty slim, with a red back and marbled sides. But the old gentleman framed in the white beard smiled at her and took off his hat, half in earnest and half like as if he were making fun. If it hadn't been for the book I think I should have let him have half a brick for himself. He had no call to cheek Myn, and I am no end good with half a brick. Still, when I looked again, I saw it was old Grandison himself, who was ever such a big pot, and could have shunted the whole of us if he had liked—Myn and me—yes, even old Currycomb and Philip Hallamshire himself. So I waited for Myn.

I gasped out—"Did you get leave?"

"Shut up!" she whispered, without the least politeness. "Go on ahead—perhaps he's watching; he's got a telescope."

Then I was sure it was old Grandison himself, for I had heard of that telescope before. They said he could see through brick walls and even solid stone ones, but that I did not believe. I had been second top in the Science Master's class on Optics, and knew that there was a limit to things. Still I did as Myn said, though I was so anxious to see the inside of that slim, red-backed book that every jump of my heart

lifted me about a foot off the ground. Talk about love! Ask any real collector if whole packs of girls ever made him feel like that.

"Bless me, no!" he will say. "Why, you know all there is to know about a girl. You don't need any pocket magnifier to look at *her* points.

"What pretty hair you've got! Ditto eyes! Ditto complexion! How sweet your smile is! (Though it looks as if she had the face-ache!) Have you been to the Royal Academy? Have you had any skating? Do you like dancing? Ever play hockey—cricket—footer? (They can't really, but they think so sometimes—those that are just out of school and don't know any better.) Who is your favourite author?"

Oh, you soon get to the end of a girl. That's nearly all, except the twaddle they talk among themselves about dresses and hats and the best way of doing their hair. *They* never have any raised dots on their surcharges—nor—but all this time I was following Myn—or rather Myn was tracking after me up the lane.

"Into the parlour," I heard her say. I knew that she meant in her house. So I went there just as if it had been the hour for her lesson, which it wasn't, not being the day at all, in fact. But the New Maid let me in all right (she had toned down a bit now), and I put my thumb over my shoulder to warn her that Myn was following—pretty close, too.

So into the parlour I stalked, and began to get out the Tacitus and the Version books—*Arnold*, edited by somebody. But no matter, Myn came in about

five minutes after, and took off her gloves as cool as a cucumber.

"Have you got——?" I began. But I did not get any farther, for Myn moved her head a little to the side in the direction of the door, to intimate that the New Maid was listening. Then she began to talk about the weather, and how she had not had time to do all the translation of Tacitus I had given her—till after a while we heard soft steps withdrawing in the direction of the kitchen.

Then I made one grab at the slim, red-backed book. But Myn was too quick for me. She snatched it away with a look of reproach that would have frozen a salamander, if the Science Master had not told us in the Zoology lesson that there was no such beast.

"Easy does it!" says she. "Law *and* order, if you please." Myn was no end of a girl for slang—not being a Pupil Teacher like me. "We will take this thing in sections, no grabbing!" So I had to wait a bit yet. Then Myn made an errand into the kitchen, opening the door very special sudden and going on tiptoe so as to see what the New Girl was up to. She was reading "From Housemaid's Cap to Coronet," a raking serial in the periodical entitled *For One and All*. She was so excited that she didn't bother about me any more, thinking every ring was certain to be the earl in his carriage, with her coronet beside him done up in silver paper, like a packet of China tea.

Of course I should have grabbed the book there and then. But Myn, with the distrustfulness which was one of her worst features—betokening a conscience

ill at rest with itself—had taken it out of the room with her.

She came back afterwards and told me, what I knew already, that Aunt Threads had gone out to tea. Then having no further excuse, she began to tell me about her visit to old Grandison up in his Crow's Nest in the yard.

"At first," she said, "I thought he was going to fell me with the poker he had in his hand. But when he saw a girl he said that he was only waiting for a foreman who needed to be reminded of his duty to the firm. So after I had told him who I was, he opened the door and let me come in.

"'Your father,' he said. 'Yes, fine man—Radical and pig-headed—but I wish there were more like him. What's that? Mustn't tell him that you came to see me? What for? Have you been getting into a scrape? You are very young! What is it, Miss——'

"'Millicent Hallamshire Sykes!' said I.

"Then I told him how there were loads of old correspondence down at the office all tied up in presses and with the stamps on each letter—because there were no envelopes to throw into waste-paper baskets in those days.

"'But what do you want with old stamps?' said Mr Grandison; 'they're no use—won't take anything through the post!'

"So I told him how we collected them——

"'We?' said he, cocking his head to one side as sharp as a rabbit at the mouth of its hole. 'Who's we?'

"There was nothing else for it, Sam," Myn went on,

"and I beg your pardon for bringing your name into it. But he is as sharp as a needle.

"'Sam Brown—teaches in the Academy, does he? —ah!' he grumbled. 'I hope, Missy, that there is no underhand business in this? I should think it my duty——'

"He was going to say 'to tell your father'—the old . . . toad!

"But I told him all about the teaching and the confidence my father had in you—and, oh, a lot of rot. So presently he calmed down, and said, 'So you collect—this Sam Brown and you—and pray what good does that do you?'

"So I thought that he might be like father—all for instruction at any price, and the . . . Old Gentleman take the hindmost. But he did not seem to care about us knowing the history that stamps will teach you—or the geographical information, and the fact that there are beavers in Canada, and seals and codfish and Princes in Glengarry bonnets out in Newfoundland.

"He was calm—yes, even cold.

"'You are wasting your time!' he said, 'and what's worse—your father's time.'

"So, though we had resolved to keep the trading very dark from old Grandison, I saw that it would be no go—only make him suspect us. So I 'fessed up about the selling them, and told him how you, Sam, blew the trumpet in the Geography classes, and *I* annexed the stamps to sell out of father's waste-paper basket. Then in a minute he was interested. Quicker than that even. It was like the lamp-lighter's pole starting a lamp

on a wet night. His face fairly glittered and shone.

"'Smart kids—children, I mean!' he said. 'I wish mine had turned out like that.'

"'Sam Brown has got to make money, you see, sir!' I said, just to explain.

"'Oh, no, it's in you both—you began before that! Now there's some sense in that—not all geography, and collecting dirty bits of paper.'

"Then he thought awhile, and says he, 'Well now, you tell me that there's a market for such things. I should be a fool if I let you forage among all my old letters and me not a penny the better. But you can sell them and I can't—or, at least, haven't the time.'

"He cast his eyes over miles of workshops, and shipbuilding yards, and docks, and the Lord knows what——"

"Myn," said I, "that's swearing, or the next thing to it. I am a pupil teacher, and more than that, I am responsible to your father——"

"Rats!" said Myn, "I am responsible for this book then—and you shan't ever look into its inside—so there! How will you like that, Mister Responsible-to-my-Father?"

I let it pass. One has to, sometimes, with a girl, and this was clearly enough one of the times.

"So he said that you and I could go over all the old letters of the firm and steam off the stamps—only cutting if there were no writing on the other side. We were to fold up carefully and put in the exact positions and bundle the same as before! And my father was to be in the office all the time."

"But will he do it?—Old Phil, I mean."

"Old who?" Myn flared up; "if you mean my father, Sam Brown, you will be good enough to speak more respectfully."

"Yes, Myn," I answered meekly. For this time she had all the face cards in her hand, and every one of them a trump. I could do absolutely nothing without her.

"Yes, and we are to keep books, and at the end of every month we are to show up all we have sold, and the cash is to be divided into three parts—one for me, and one for you, Sam Brown, and one for old Grandison!"

Though I knew it was coming—I could see well enough—yet I confess I jumped in my seat when she said it. The grasping old wretch! Him with all that money!

But Myn did not think so. Funny girl—Myn. Always saying and doing things different from other people.

"Well, see here, Sam Brown," she said. "I don't think it's mean at all. They are his stamps, aren't they? Well then? And how does he know we are not going to give away half the secrets of the firm? And besides" (here Myn was thoughtful like her father writing a Russian letter), "perhaps he is just trying us, and means to help us all the more. It's a pretty good spec. as it stands, Sam—not to speak of this book!"

And she plunked down the slim red-back right under my nose. You never saw such a book. It was chock-full of trial stamps, little Prince Napoleons, old French stamps all done out on folding sheets and

backed with cloth. First there was the paper that the stamp was printed on, then the stamp printed on white paper, and then the proper stamp printed on its own "foundation colour" and on the right paper. I never saw anything like it. There were five of each sort, all uncut and unused.

Pharaoh and his host! I nearly fainted. I knew at once that this was far beyond anything that I had ever dreamed of, and I saw that we could never hope to sell it here in East Dene or even in Thorsby. Why, nobody but old Grandison could have afforded to buy it! It was simply gorgeous. Oh, and there were things that made you shiver and gasp. Essay series of all sorts of stamps in the different colours the printers had tried—weird things that looked as if they had been puddled in some artist fellow's paint-box. Then at the bottom there was the stamp as it had been issued.

"What's all this?" I could hardly gasp out the question.

"That's the Book of the Bank of France!" said Myn, as calmly as if she had said it was Jevons's *Logic* or Colenso's *Arithmetic*.

"The which?" said I, palping it with my antennæ, as it were. I mean I dared hardly lay a human finger on it, lest it should vanish away. Talk of fairy gold!

So Myn—Cucumber Myn—told me that old Grandison had had something to do with helping the French Government sometime after the war. He was a director of the Bank of England, or the East Dene Savings Bank, or something great and rich. Anyway, he had done a service to the French at the

time when they were hard up after their war—I think it was. And they had given him one of these books, which was for the purpose of showing that you couldn't cheat the owner to the extent of a one-centime stamp.

"But nobody would buy that here, Myn!" I cried in a kind of despair.

"No, Sam Brown, and that's just it. You've got to go up to London by the boat—it's cheaper that way—from Thorsby, you know. And then you must find out who will buy a thing like that—and you sell it, you hear?"

I heard, but asked where the journey money was to come from.

"You are going," said Myn, calmly. "The holidays are in four days. You will be free. And I have got four pounds of my own for your expenses. If we lose, we can count it out of what we make next year. But go you must and sell that book!" Thus, because Myn arranged it so, and because Myn couldn't go herself, I must go up to London with the Proof Book of the Bank of France.

I felt fearfully grand at the prospect. For of course I wanted fearfully to go. But I told Myn that she would have done much better herself.

"I know that," she answered sadly, "but father wouldn't let me go, you see. So it's no use asking. I have got to trust you with it. It's a poor enough lookout. But if you let it go a penny under fifty pounds—never look me in the face again!"

I said I wouldn't, and was making for the door, but she lagged me by my coat-tails to make me stop and hear reason.

"Now, you *are* going," she said, "and you attend to what I say!"

I attended all right, but in my secret heart I did not believe that all the stamps in the world were worth fifty pounds! I did not say that to Myn, of course. I had more good sense. No use getting Myn in a wax for nothing. It would be bad enough when I got back.

Besides, I was going to London in the holidays, and that was joy enough for any fellow. So I let the rest go hang.

CHAPTER VIII

MY FIRST CRIME

THE holidays came and I went to London. Yes, from Leith to London—in a ship. Once on a time Jo Turner and I had made all our arrangements for running away to sea. After reading Captain Marryat it was, and another book all full of tornadoes and things, called *The Cruise of the Midge.* But after the ship got outside the Isle of May, I took just two or three looks at the sea, and was glad I had had a father who caught me in the garden with my "swag" done up in a navy-blue spotted handkerchief and attached to a hooked stick.

I know what he did with the stick, but what became of the "swag" I do not know to this day. Some of it was dog-biscuits bought with my own money—or at least Jo Turner's. I thought at the time it was awfully mean of father nailing them. But during the next twenty hours I honoured him as the wisest man that had ever lived, and thanked Providence for having given me a father who knew so much about the sea, and them that go down to it in ships.

As for me, I swore that I would tramp back all the way rather than tempt again the restless main. If it had only kept still, I should not have minded. At least, I don't believe I would. Well, I pass all that. My only consolation was the Book of the Bank of

France, which I had under my coat. That made me feel there was some use in going on living, but—I resolved to wait till a tunnel was made before I went abroad upon my adventures.

Myn had given me all sorts of counsels as to what I was to do when I got to London, and had put the address of the hotel where her father stayed into my hand. I did not say anything, but I knew mighty well that a hotel that did for old Phil Hallamshire's purse, wouldn't suit mine.

So I got hold of a ragged old Bradshaw that was tossing about on the table of what they called the "saloon," and when we got into calmer water going up the Thames, I looked through all the advertisements that were left. Most of them had been used for pipe-lights. (The villain who smokes when ship is in motion, or anywhere except in a graving-dock, should be hanged without trial!)

At last I hit upon what I thought was the very thing I wanted. It was quite at the end, and it read something like this:

> STRAMASH'S PRIVATE HOTEL and BOARDING-HOUSE, Portland Street, W.C. Lots of Room. Lots of Food. Near Everything. All Home Comforts. Inclusive Terms (except Wine and Washing), 4s. 6d. per day. No tips. No extras.

This appeared about my figure. I would only be a day or two, and then—hey! for home—my own that is, not Britannia's, which most thoughtlessly is "on the mountain waves." I am loyal, but not to that point. If the sea is our country's first line of

defence—in spite of my well-known courage I will sit tight on the second line, and wait for the landing of the enemy—yes, firmly as if fixed there by a screw-nail. My country will be proud of me—yes, certainly, but it will be upon dry land.

Nor can I do justice to London. I will not describe it, in spite of the fact that a country boy's first look at London is always an epoch in his life. It wasn't the size of it—I knew nothing about that, you see, I only went where there were people who bought and sold stamps. And at that time there were not many. I think, however, I saw most of these. I will not describe them except in my own way, and if anybody thinks he can pick out some one he knew, I give him fair warning that he is mistaken. It was quite another fellow.

You see I didn't know the real tip-toppers, and had to depend chiefly on chance—the seeing of a small dirty window with a few cases of stamps, or sheets with each stamp priced, mostly at a penny or a halfpenny—for finding out where stamps were sold. Of course I did not dream that these people could buy my Book of the Bank of France. But I used to ask for stamps which I knew they would not have—old Swiss Cantons mostly—and then say at the end, "You couldn't tell me, could you, where I should be likely to find such a thing?"

Mostly they said simply that they knew nothing about the matter—that their sheets came from people living out of London (which I found out to be true enough). Only on two or three occasions did I get a really helpful address.

The first I went to see—that is, of the men in a

fairly big way—was pretty well along the twisty street that runs to the east—the Strand or the Fleet, or something like that they call it. The house was all over placards of "Monstre Packets," and was all gilt like a Christmas cracker which had fallen in the mud. That is outside. But inside—my, what a difference! I think it was the dustiest hole I was ever in in my life. It would have made a self-respecting spider sick only to look in at the door.

Dust everywhere! They daren't move it, I fancy, or it would have blocked the street like the biggest snowstorm that ever was.

And when you went inside, a frowsy-headed man with hair like cotton waste in an engine-room shot his head out at you, as if his neck had been a three-draw telescope. There were also several boy-sweeps shinning up and down ladders in a haze that made you sneeze even when keeping pretty near the door as I did.

"What do you want?" said the cotton-waste head—reddish it was, and all sprinkled with ash, like the people in the Bible who were in family mourning. Though what he could have been in mourning *for*, I don't know, unless it was because he could not raise enough money to buy a broom.

"If you please," I said, very politely, "do you want to buy——?"

"I don't want to buy," cried the man, "I want to sell! What else would I be here for! What for do you think I am paying rent—and taxes—and all these valuable assistants——?"

He indicated the sweeps on the different ladders with his hand. They grinned, and one of them

popped the half a dozen little bulgy envelopes he was carrying into a compartment, getting a fresh supply of dust on his fingers as he did so. This, for unknown reasons, he smeared all over his face. But the man with the cotton-waste hair, and the three-draw telescopic neck, had his wits about him, however.

"You, Griggs," he cried, "come down that ladder immediately, and I will throw you into the cellar!"

"Why, what have I done?" mourned Griggs, going right up to the top to be out of the way. His master advanced and shook the ladder fiercely, but Griggs hung on to the shelves.

"You have put the Thrippenny Universal Packet No. 13—no two stamps the same postmark—into the compartment No. 15 reserved for Special Value, five hundred mixed—no common countries except Great Britain, Germany, Austria and America!"

"So I have, master!" cried Griggs, re-arranging his envelopes. "It was that fellow wanting to sell *us* anything that made me laugh! I'm sorry, master!"

"Come down, you Griggs!" shouted the master; "come, or I'll break your neck!"

Again he agitated the ladder every way—first on one leg then on the other. Then suddenly he pulled it away. But Griggs was a strategist. He fell, but it was upon the head and neck of the frowsy man, who was instantly shut up like the telescope aforesaid. Griggs picked himself up hastily, scuttled through a trap-door into a black hole, and disappeared. The master arose more slowly, shook himself, tried the working of his neck in different directions, screwing his face to see if any joint were broken. Deciding that all was in working order, he protruded it once

more at me, and said quite amiably, "What can I do for you, sir?"

I was so much astonished that at first I could not answer. I thought that at least he would have slain Griggs, and indeed I kept pretty near the door myself with my precious book under my arm.

"I should like you to buy this fine collection of French essays——"

"Book shop — Smith's — three doors east," he answered. "We don't deal in essays, nor yet moral tales, nor Edgewares nor Scotts, nor anything but stamps in packets—big packets. Sacks of stamps, formerly one penny each and no discount, suitable for papering rooms — bedrooms — bathrooms—smoking-rooms—billiard——" Hullo, Mr Griggs—come and attend to this customer, Griggs!"

A small boy was drawing designs in dirt on the window outside, but I saw no customer.

"Griggs—where's Griggs!" shouted the master ot all these packets and bales. "Whatever has become of Griggs? Forward there, Griggs!"

With a rush Griggs came up the cellar ladder, which I had not seen in the darkness. He stood not upon the order of his going, but went for that boy who was drawing the mud designs on the plate glass. There was a kind of temporary arrangement in windmills which ended in the gutter. Cabmen and bus-drivers cheered, Griggs came out on top, his teeth gleaming like those of Bones at a nigger minstrel performance. For a moment he danced upon his rival, and then he dexterously avoided a policeman by darting between his legs, and the next moment was inside the shop, up a ladder, and practically indis-

tinguishable from the other sweeps at work in this curious Stamp Emporium.

The policeman looked within, coughed, was offered a sixpenny packet for fivepence halfpenny, and retreated, mystified by the strange commerce.

"Let me see the album," said the master of these revels. I looked at his hands, and decided that I would not trust it out of my own. I opened it, however, with every desire (apparent) to please, and to save him trouble. I showed him all the various stages of the life of the stamps—the tinting of the paper, and so on. I was waxing eloquent, when the voice of the Frowsy One cut me short.

"Why, they are all *un*-used! That takes away altogether from their value! I can't give you anything for this! Nothing at all! How do I know that they are genuine?"

"Very well, sir," I said, "may I ask you if you have any idea where I would find some one who would consider—— ?"

"I am the biggest dealer in the world," cried the Grand Frowsy; "I sell by the bale, by the hogshead, by the pound, and the hundredweight! I have a contract to cover all the royal apartments in the palace—of Belgrade, with used stamps—a new design of my own—one right side up and the next one wrong—a head standing on his head—ha, ha!—very effective! If *I* cannot buy, nobody else can. How much do you want?"

"Fifty pounds!" said I.

There was an instant uproar. The master shouted for Griggs—for M'Phun, for Mahony, and other names that I did not stop to hear. He himself

leaped the counter, his head and neck shooting out and in as if worked by steam. The young sweeps shinned down the ladders, and rushed at me with joyous howls.

But I did not wait. I judged it useless. So I bolted out, and fell into the arms of the suspicious policeman who had been waiting for Griggs.

"Now then," he said, grasping me firmly by the arm, "you come along o' me—I have been laggin' for you. I thought by the way you went in that you would come out in a hurry. What's that you have got below your arm?"

"It's a book—a book of stamps," I said. "I am not the boy who had the fight with the other boy who was dirtying the window with mud—can't you see?"

The policeman looked at me. I was twice Griggs's size, and, besides, was specially smartly dressed in East Dene fashion for my first morning in London. And to think that I should be fated to end it at the police-court! What would Myn say?

"You do seem to have washed a bit—also grown," he said reluctantly, "but that does not explain why you came at me like a wind-mill. Have you lost anything, mister?—You, mister ——!"

He vainly tried to read the proprietor's name over window or door. Failing in this, he added to the frowsy-headed one, "Have you lost anything, Mister Prize-Packet-Stamp-Emporium?"

"Fifty pounds! Fifty pounds!" cried the outraged vendor, still harking on the shameful price I had asked him for a slim little book—and with only unused stamps in it too—not one of them properly

passed through the post! For such opinions were not uncommon at that time—even later.

"Fifty pounds!" repeated the policeman, triumphantly; "that's a reg'lar Old Bailey job. Follow me to the office, if you please, Mister Emporium."

And amid a growing crowd, for the first time in my life I was haled to prison. I refused, however, to give up the book under my arm, and clung to it desperately, determining that whatever happened, Myn's book should not come to harm through me.

The noise fell away—you can't think how suddenly—as I was propelled into the police-station—rather an important one, and, luckily, quite near.

"He's stolen fifty pounds! Fifty pounds! The young villain!" These were the last words I heard as the door banged behind me.

I stood before a man with a flat much braided cap on, who sat writing in a book, and took not the slightest notice of our entrance.

"If you please, Inspector——!" began my captor.

"Hold your tongue, constable!" said the Inspector, and went on writing.

"I never said—I declare to you—I tell you I never——" interrupted the bare-headed Frowsy Man, all out of breath and speaking thickly.

"If that man opens his mouth again till I give him leave, put him in No. 1!"

"But it's all a mistake—I have nothing against the young man!" shouted the decorator of the palace of Belgrade.

"No. 1!" said the Inspector, gently, and continued to write.

There was a slight scuffle. Two giants, hitherto somnolent on a bench in the background, suddenly slid alongside, and lo! the Frowsy One was not. They removed him as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world.

Whereupon Griggs's head, which had been evident peering round the door, also removed itself with exceeding promptitude.

I stood alone but silent in the presence of Justice. And the Inspector wrote on.

CHAPTER IX

I GET MIXED UP WITH THE POLICE

WELL, the difficulty I had to make these police folk believe that it was all fair, square and above-board, you would hardly believe. But I held Old Phil Hallamshire over their heads, I brandished Old Phil, so to speak — I even hauled in his brother the baronet. They were not on speaking terms, Old Phil and the M.P. But that did not matter. No more was I. But I was not proud. *I* did not mind not having been introduced to Sir Thingummy Sykes!

Well, they went and telegraphed, while I languished in a darksome dungeon; and my pursuer kicked the door of No. 1—so much so indeed, that the Inspector sent one of his myrmidons to tell him that if he didn't make less row, he would have his boots taken off.

It was all right, however, in the long run, and the Frowsy One said that he was sorry, that there was not a stain on my character, and that he would go off home and clout Griggs. The which he proceeded to do, and I found myself once more in the hurry-scurry of London streets with my precious book under my arm.

It was now too late to do more that day, so I went back to my boarding-house. Mrs Stramash met me

in the hall, and, looking hard at my book, asked me if I had "taken any orders."

I said "No"—that I was trying to sell a Book of the Bank of France—a phrase which instantly filled her with intense suspicion. Then there came in a weedy-looking boy with reddish hair, who whistled the "Old Obadiah," and was apparently a son of the house. He pitched a strapful of books into the corner—thereby achieving his preparation for the morrow's lessons.

Then he pointed with one dirty finger at me.

"Mum," he said, "*he* don't stay with us? Why, I saw him took to the station to-day by the police!"

"What!" cried Mrs Stramash, turning upon me, "can it be possible? Have I nursed an adder in me bosom?"

(She had—but it wasn't me—not if I know it!—It was a red-haired adder.)

But with the noble attitude of Lord Chatham addressing the House of Lords, in the picture at Old Phil's, she waved me out.

"No one in this house who have had any dealings with the police!" she cried, in righteous indignation. "Thanks be to a Hall-Watchful Hye, I have always kep' a decent house——"

"But dirty!" I added in the style of Myn—and under my breath.

"What's that ye are muttering, ye apostle of sin? Out of here with you!" cried the lady, "or I shall have in the police to take you up again."

But I had not been Myn's pupil for so long without learning something.

"Happy to see them," I said, "if only to help me to get my valuables out of your clutches!"

"Thomas Ormithwaite Jenks Stramash, go for the police at once—go for the police—tell them there's a thief here!"

"That's right," I said, "listen to that, you others" (for the boarders had collected on various landings), "that's defamation of character! I know one who has suffered for that to-day already. Aye, and one who is suffering even now!"

(I was thinking of Griggs).

The boarders drew off, but obviously listened from behind doors.

"Thomas Ormithwaite," cried his mother after the speeding youth, "say nothing about the thief! I forbid you to use the word!"

"He does not need," I replied, "it has been used already. I have witnesses!"

In about a quarter of an hour two stalwart constables appeared. They set their hands on their hips and looked at me. They bent and looked closer. Then they looked at each other, and laughed heartily.

"It's the stamp man!" they said.

"He's all right, missis," added the elder, a grey-headed sergeant, "on'y loony!"

This was not exactly polite, but there was one comforting thing in it—the word "stamp *man*." If he had said "boy" I never could have forgiven him. But he said "man," and all was peace. As for "loony"—I did not mind being called that. In East Dene, at election time, it is always applied to rival candidates by the partisans of the opposite side, as well as to the greatest politicians of the age—men

sitting on cushioned benches—the front ones too—of the House of Commons; while as to the House of Lords, East Dene called that venerable body "Loonydom," and had done with it. It was a fearfully abusive place, East Dene. So I did not in the least mind the pepper-and-salt sergeant of police calling me a "loony." In fact, it was a kind of bond between us. We might have been discussing municipal politics in High Street, East Dene.

I told him that I was under suspicion, and Mrs Stramash told him that she would have no one in her house who, etc., etc. I said that now I would not stay if Mrs Stramash paid me, but that she had called me a thief, and I had witnesses. The grey-headed policeman, whose name was Sands, puckered his lips as if he were going to whistle, pulled out a lead-pencil, thrust it into his mouth by way of preparation for note-taking, and requested me to state my case.

Then all at once Mrs Stramash surrendered. It was getting serious, and besides, as she stated more than once, she wanted to get down to the kitchen, where she had a cook who was but indifferent honest.

She said that if I would go, there and then, I could have my baggage on paying bed and breakfast.

For this, who more willing than I? Four shillings and six pennies changed hands. I went to my cubbyhole and put my things together. The grey-headed sergeant accompanied me with an air of great detachment, but I could hear his sniff, like a man who is on the track of drains.

" Hum," he said, when I was on the pavement—I and my meagre belongings—"now where do you

think of going? We can't mobilise the whole police force to look after you, my son."

I told him promptly that I didn't know, but ventured a suggestion that he, who knew London so well, might direct me to a good hotel.

He rattled over the names of a few dozens. But I knew by the sound of them that they were all Old Phil Hallamshire's kind—not mine. There was the Grand this and the Imperial that—Charing Cross, and Euston's, and Brown's.

I thought Brown's sounded all right, as my own name was Brown. It might be kept by a relative who would let me off cheap.

The sergeant had sent off the other policeman, and he and I stood together in Portland Street with the gas-lamps a-lighting about us, and farther off the boom of London like a hive of bees going to sleep.

He slapped his thigh with his gloves, as indeed he was doing all the time.

"Did you ever see a flunkey?" he said, "a fellow all calves and cheek? Or a butler behind a white choker, or gentlemen waiters that you have to pay for just speaking to?"

I said that once I had looked in at the town-hall door at East Dene (knowing the policeman on duty), and had seen something like all these things.

"Well," he said, "if you go to Brown's, you will have all these, and it will stand you in more a day than it will if you come out with me to our little street opposite the Elephant and Castle, where my wife (and a good one she is!) keeps lodgers. It will take you a little longer to get over on a bus. But you will save money, and"—here he glanced know-

ingly at me—"I really think that you are too sharp to be let run wild in London. It will be well to put you, as it were, under official control."

So we got on a bus, he and I, and went out to his house. He had finished duty, it seemed; and had only come to Portland Street in the hope that the call might prove to be "something worth while."

Well, it did—for me.

I liked Mrs Sands at sight—a buxom woman much like my own mother, but without quite such ruddy cheeks. We made a bargain in about four minutes—ten shillings a week with breakfast and "what was going" at night.

What was going that night proved very good—fish pie and bread, with coffee, and some kind of country cake made with batter that just melted in the mouth.

I thought how I should love to tell Myn all about my London adventures—I was having them, and no mistake—and the whole episode of East Wellington Street, by the Elephant and Castle, would be fine. But there came a slight rustle in the passage, a sort of breath of outdoor air, and a girl came in with a roll of music under her arm. She kissed the policeman's wife on both cheeks in a way that was not usual in East Dene. And then she batted the sergeant over the head with her music roll.

"How many people have you truncheoned to-day? I'll teach you!" she cried. I expected the sergeant to arise and slay her, or take her up on the spot or something. But he didn't. He only laughed and introduced me.

"Mr Sam Brown," says he, "this is my daughter Jenny!"

The girl spun round on her heels with a little cry.

"Good-*ness*, father! Why, I never saw him!"

I knew she hadn't, for I was sitting rather in the shade, and the young lady had been in something of a hurry.

"I beg your pardon," she said, shaking hands with a great change in her manner, "I am sorry that I was too much taken up with welcoming my parents——"

"Welcoming!" said the sergeant, rubbing his cheek.

Miss Jenny threatened him again with her music roll, and he pretended to be immensely frightened. He wasn't really, you know. For she was only a girl with curly hair, pretty black, and a dinky little hat which she called a "toque." She had a red ribbon in a bow at the neck, a little to the left side. Myn wears blue. I have always liked blue best, but this was nice too, and I am not going to deny it. Except to Myn.

"You deserve assault and battery," she said to her father.

"Thirty days to three months!" said her father, smiling.

"You are not in the discharge of your duty," she retorted; "and besides, even if you were, you have no witnesses!"

The sergeant indicated me with the toe of his boot.

Miss Jenny looked at me steadily a good while.

"If you think that this young gentleman will say

anything to my disadvantage, you are vastly mistaken, father—*or I am!*"

From that moment I began to think that I was going to like that house. The Book of the Bank of France might take longer to sell than I had anticipated. Up till then, I had meant really to take almost anything that I could get for it, but now I saw the wisdom of Myn's reserved price. There is no use in giving away a really good thing for nothing. I put it to you, now, is there? And Miss Jenny, when I showed her the book, quite agreed.

I learned a lot of things that night I had no idea of before. Folks up in East Dene don't know everything, though they think they do. For instance, I learned All Fours—a wonderful game I had never even heard of before; and in return I showed the Book of the Bank of France to Miss Jenny and her father. I was always good at explaining stamps, and Miss Jenny thoroughly enjoyed it. Her father, tired with his long day on the pavements, dozed off honest and frequent. And this although I made it ever so interesting. Jenny said so. I dropped the Miss at twenty to nine, and before ten she was calling me Sam. I will tell you how that happened.

But I had not forgotten about Myn, as you might think. Myn and I were the greatest, the very greatest of friends, but there was no reason in the world why I should not be friends with Miss Jenny too—under the protection of Her Majesty's police force—even if half asleep and unable to distinguish a blue Liberian rock from a British Guiana sailing-ship. Not caring, either—which is more!

Then punctual at nine-thirty, in there came a

smart young man who wore gloves. That was no business of mine. Any fellow may wear gloves if he likes. But somehow I felt as if I could have kicked this fellow at sight. They were brown gloves, and he was quite a while taking them off—as if any one couldn't see through that.

"Oh, Mr Sleeman," said Miss Jenny, "Mr Brown here has such a lovely collection of stamps—I am sure that you will like to see them!"

"Thanks—no-o-oh!" said Mr Sleeman in a high, head voice, "I used to go in for that kind of thing when I was a kid—gum penny Queen's Heads on old copy-books, and so on—but now!"

He smiled contemptuously.

"Yes—yes," went on Mr Sleeman, after I had explained to him what really was meant by a collection of stamps, "it's rum the things children will do! I remember a young brother of mine who took to collecting the pictures on vesta match-boxes—till father found out, and put the lot in the fire!"

I kept, for the moment, my temper, and went on to show the uses of the Book of the Bank of France, how curious was the *couleur de fond*, then the stamp printed on white paper, and last of all the complete stamp printed on its own tinted paper as issued.

"Ha," said Mr Sleeman, "I would as soon think of collecting Bass's beer labels—much prettier too! Ha, ha!"

"You *look* as if you might have had a pretty collection of those by this time!" I answered.

I spoke low, but I saw the colour leave Miss Jenny's face. She glanced at her father. He was certainly

asleep the moment before. But it must have been with one ear cocked and one eye open.

"Hey, what's that?—You two blessed young bantams!" he cried. "Come, none of that in my house!"

"It wasn't Sam's fault!" said Jenny.

"Sam?" cried Mr Sleeman, suspiciously.

"Sam!" said her father, looking from one to the other.

"Sam—who's Sam?" demanded Jenny's mother, appearing at the door with a large mark of interrogation on her buxom face.

"This is Sam!" said Jenny, putting her hand on my shoulder by way of accolade. "Rise, Sir Samuel!"

And just then the clock struck ten. Myn would be putting her father to bye-bye with a bottle to his feet, and a glass of something straw-coloured, with lemon floating in it, on the table at his side.

In my room I thought of Myn, and how much I preferred a blue neck-ribbon plunk in the middle to a red one splashed a little at one side.

Then I thought how sick the fellow with the gloves had looked!

CHAPTER X

THE JERSEY TREAT

THE grey-haired policeman was Sergeant Sands, so his wife's name was Mrs Sands, and the daughter with the roll of music under her arm, Jenny Sands. Rather a pretty name, don't you think?—for an ordinary girl, I mean—of course not like Millicent Hallamshire Sykes.

Of course I was all square with Myn—dead-set on her, in fact. She was my business partner, and I wasn't going to go back on her, not I! All the same, it's a funny thing that you haven't control of your own mind. A fellow would think he had, but he hasn't. Afterwards, when he's grown up and begins to sport a bit of a bow-window, it may be different. But not when a chap is young. All that night I kept thinking time about of Myn and Jenny—the times we had when the lamps were lit for lessons and old Aunt Threads was asleep. And then again it would be Miss Jenny, and how bright she looked, and how her eyes flashed when she told them who "Sam" was.

Did you ever play "candlestick" in the middle of a sea-saw with a girl at either end of the plank? Well, if you have, that is how I felt.

Now I know all the girls who read this (there won't be many, for they don't care about stamps, as a

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rule) will say what a bäääääd, ungrateful—yes, just that—what's-his-name, I was, and how shamefully I behaved to Myn. Now I've told them once and I tell them again, that this isn't a love story, also what there is of *that* comes in by accident—as indeed, so far as I have seen, it mostly does in real people's lives.

In Green Books, of course, it is different. Anyway, most fellows will understand, if girls don't. Why, Myn knows the difference between the ears of wheat and the willow-leaves in the forged and genuine early '49 and '50 French Republics! Well, that makes her almost as good as if she had been a boy. Jenny Sands, though as pretty as a peach and all that, was only a girl after all. She was, however, anxious to learn, and picked up things wonderfully quickly. She never forgot what she had been taught—which was a most wonderful thing, as what I told her was all jolly technical and nice.

The next day Sergeant Sands said that he would take me to a place where they sold stamps, but as it was kept by a foreigner (he said "fur'ner"), he would wait at the door in case. He wouldn't come in—such not being any part of his duty, not till he was called. But his belief was that "fur'ners" wanted watching. Also he had got hold of a proverb somewhere to the effect that "one Greek could cheat six Jews, one Maltese could cheat six Greeks, one Armenian six Maltese, and as for six Armenians, they could cheat the Old Gentleman himself! This fellow was an Armenian Jew whose mother was a Maltese married to a Greek street-restaurant keeper.

Yet the name over the door was Piper, which

seemed very little for a pedigree like that. However, not being proud, I went in. I found a smallish man seated, turning over sheaves on sheaves of stamps and glaring at them with a horn eye-piece, like a watchmaker when he is tickling your watch and thinking how much you will stand to have it cleaned at his shop. He was a queer little man with a small black fez of silk on his head; his face was very pale, and all ruled in straight black lines as if put on with a crayon.

There were two just under the cap which were his eyebrows. Beneath were two that winked and quavered unpleasantly. These were his eyelashes. His nose was like chalk, and owing to the bright light did not seem to cast any shadow; but he had a thin moustache, as if drawn with ink on his upper lip—ruled rather, for it was quite straight, too, like American postmarks, only without the eagle.

It proved indeed to be more straight than the gentleman himself. For though he rose when I went in, and bowed fawningly, he sat down again as soon as he knew that I had something to sell, instead of buying anything. But he did not chase me out of the shop, as the Frowsy One had done. He only held out his hand for my book. It was, however, a clean hand, indeed white as chalk, as if he had never been out in the sun in his life.

"French!" he said contemptuously. "They're no goot—no goot to me!" All the same he took the book into a clearer light and turned over the leaves.

"Do you know," he said, looking at me with his eyes that winked and twinkled all the time,

"that I could have you arrested? This is one ot the private books—the property of the Bank of France!"

"All right," said I, easily, "arrest away!"

He looked at me from head to foot, blinking all the time.

"How much do you want for it?" he said, moving his hand to his pocket.

"One Hundred Pounds!" said I, thinking it better to ask a lot, as there was no chance of getting anything.

He whistled and looked at me again. I suppose the marks of gaol-bird were not very obvious upon me.

"Can you give a straight history of this?" he said, "how came you by it, I mean?"

"Of course I can," I said indignantly. "What do you take me for?"

"That is not my business," he said softly. "Will you leave this book with me till to-morrow? I think we might come to an agreement. I have a friend in Paris who is interested in things like these. I might give you a five-pound note" (watching my face keenly) "or even two——!"

"I will not let it out of my sight on any condition," said I, "and my price is what I said."

He was turning my precious book in all directions, in order, apparently, to get a clearer light upon it. He had his back to me. Finally he closed it with a snap, and handed it back to me, after kindly wrapping a piece of paper about it as if to preserve the morocco binding. This seemed to me suspicious, and I opened it out before his eyes. He stood immovable,

but his hand went behind him to a shelf, as if in search of a weapon.

"Where is my page of one franc orange?" I cried. "Where are my vermilions? Where are my——oh, there are four pages cut out. Give them back—give them back!"

"I vill gif you in charge at the police!" said my Greco-Maltese-Armenian with Piper over his door.

But I was before him. I ran into the street.

"Sergeant!" I cried. "Sergeant!"

And the tall man in blue blocked up the doorway.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded with official gruffness.

The little twinkling man was all agitated now. He babbled. I explained.

"I have them not—I never saw them?" he denied, wringing his hands. Sufferance had been the badge of all his tribe—cunning their weapon. He trembled before the English police as if Sergeant Sands had been one of the Sultan's Bashi-Bazouks.

"You had better come along with me, Mr Piper!" said the sergeant, producing a pair of handcuffs with much intentional clanking out of his tail pockets.

"No—oh, no, good sir!" cried Mr Piper. "I should be ruined—I should indeed. Think of my poor, poor families!"

"Families?" demanded the policeman, astonished.

"Yiss, yiss," he wept, "von family in Bagdad, von in Erzeroum, von in Samarkand, and von here in London. It is allowed by my religion to have vives four! And all I have to support zem is *djuss* this von leetle shop!"

"Poor wretch!" said Sergeant Sands, compassion-

ately. "Well, give the lad his stamps. I know you have them—I saw them last night. So did many people at the station-house."

"But the young gentleman is mistake—certainly mistake!" cried the fur'ner. "I haf return him all—all! Perhaps he has not observe—perhaps they have slipped. There is the paper on the floor, beneez his feet. Oh, sir!"

The sergeant picked up the wrapping in which Mr Piper had handed me back my Book of the Bank of France. *The missing leaves were there.*

I cannot imagine even now how it was done. But done it was. However, Sergeant Sands did not interest himself in any "furreneering" sleight of hand. He only shook the handcuffs at the wretched Mr Piper, and went out saying, "Yes, they are there, because you put them there. But if I had not been at the door you would have robbed the lad. I shall remember this, and the next complaint I have, you shall have as many years as you have wives, and as hard labour!"

So there were the sergeant and I out again on the pavement, no further forward than before.

"Never mind, lad," he said kindly, "Rome wasn't built in a day. We will try elsewhere—and oh, I forgot—Jenny said that if you did not succeed you could go to the School of Music and have lunch with her. I shall be busy till two. Then you can come along to Vine Street."

There was nothing else for it, and after I had got my book wrapped up at a warehouse where they sold paper, at which the sergeant was known, I went on to find Miss Jenny. There were about fifty hundred

girls, buzzing about a biggish courtyard, with classrooms and things all round, and howling and strumming like what girls do, going on all the time inside. The doorkeeper had been deaf twelve years. He told me himself, and I don't wonder. Perhaps however, he had been picked on purpose for the place. There are societies who see to things like that.

Presently I saw Miss Jenny. She was with five other girls, and I felt in my pocket to see if I had enough money to pay for all the lot. Jenny came up and I took off my cap. That was all right. They were nice girls, but rather numerous.

"Going to take us out to lunch? Oh, good!" said Jenny. "Girls, this is Sam!"

And the girls just twinkled and said, "How do, Sam!" as if they had known me all their lives.

So I said that I should be most happy and all the rest of it—polite as a dustman before a town councillor's door.

But to my astonishment all the girls called out at once, "Jersey treat—Jersey treat!"

Then they laughed to see how astonished I was, and asked if I had never heard of a Jersey treat. Of course I said "No," that I had heard of Jersey cows and Jersey lilies, but never of a Jersey treat. I wanted to ask if it was fearfully expensive, for I had only about six shillings in my pocket. However, the next moment I was glad I had not done that. I *should* have looked a fool.

For Miss Jenny told me that a "Jersey treat" was their word for each one paying for themselves. And when, just for the look of things, I made some demur, they all said together: "Then we will go by our-

selves, thank you very much all the same, Mr Sam." Then they sang a song right on the pavement—one making up one line and another another, but all taking parts as nice as ninepence!

"Oh, Sam—nice Mister Sam!
Sam with the brown paper under his arm.
Thank you, dear Sam,
But we'll pay for our jam,
Our mustard and ham!
Awful nice Sam,
Jenny Sands' Sam—
Who isn't a sheep, but looks like a lamb—
Sam with the brown paper under his arm!"

I thought that it was just a little bit forward, but Jenny explained that they always went on like donkeys when they came out of the Composition class. Though what that had to do with it I could not make out. I think they were all, what they call in East Dene, "taking the loan of me" a bit.

Though on the whole I prefer that to your snifflly, cry-the-floor-damp girl. But at the feeding-place we went to they behaved all right. The Jersey treat was a big success, and cost me just sevenpence for my share. They told me their names. Such rum ones they were—Eustacia Grimes, Flo Rowlands, Inky Wood, Peachy Lee, Euretta Collingwood, and Jenny Sands, which last I knew already. They made me learn them, too, and that was a swot; because I was half of opinion that, like the song about "Nice Mister Sam," they had made them up on the spot—all except Miss Jenny's, that is.

However, they made me promise that I should take

them out to a real treat if, and when, I sold my book. For Jenny told them all about it.

I even proposed to show it to them, but they shouted out a unanimous

> "No, no—No, you don't, Sam!
> Try and behave like a gemple-màm—
> We'd rather see you than your samples, Sam!"

They seemed to sing everything quite naturally in all sorts of keys. Extraordinary girls they were! They could have sung the multiplication table, all in parts and all correct as "God save the Queen!" But with the noise they made I looked to see if the people were not coming to turn us out. But they were used to the junior young ladies of the School of Music in that restaurant and never blinked. Indeed, there was far more noise at some of the tables than at ours.

Then after it was over, and they had passed me their sixpences for me to pay, with the whispered injunction, "Only a penny tip, mind, or you'll spoil the market," we went out. They had all more classes, and more after that—all music. I never knew there were so many different ways of making a noise before, or that you had to work so hard learning how.

But they were nice girls too. You can't imagine how nice; and if you do, I hope you won't say anything to Myn. Curiously enough, they suddenly all became shy as it were. And at the door Eustacia Grimes drew me aside and asked if I had any sisters. I denied it. Then she said that she had been thinking all the time how nice I was, and that she would like to be a sister to me.

As we passed the cashier's desk Flo Rowlands lagged a little and asked me the same question. And by the time we were on the pavement I had five sisters—quite a family indeed. But my new relatives never stopped to shake hands, but rushed off to their Harmony class singing these words:—

> "Sam, Sam, sweet brother Sam—
> Sam from the land of marmalade jam!"

Only Miss Jenny was left. She had not offered to be a sister to me, and she laid a hand on my coat-cuff and said, "You don't mind them, do you, Sam? They're nice girls—only sillies! Now you be off to find father!" And I went.

CHAPTER XI

MYN TAKES TO THOUGHT-READING

OF course I had to tell Myn all about my researches. Here is my letter :—

"123 EAST WELLINGTON STREET,
"ELEPHANT AND CASTLE,
"LONDON, S.E.

"DEAR MYN,—I have not been able to sell the book, because I have only been here three days. Once I nearly got a man into the hands of the police, and once I have been there myself. At the first go a man chased me out of his shop, and then another man wanted to crab four of my best leaves—cut them out, *he* did. But I was too sharp, with a police-sergeant posted outside all ready fixed to come in and see about things.

"Now I am living with that policeman. It is much nicer, though at present time of writing I can't just tell you how much nicer. But, at anyrate, it is cheaper—oh, lots. They stuck it on to me at the hotel I went to, and that was one of the cheapest in London. But here I only pay ten bob—shillings a week, I mean, instead of four shillings *per day*—a great saving, as you will see if you can multiply by seven times.

"Sergeant Sands is the policeman's name, and he is ever such a nice man. Also his wife is Mrs Sands. There is one daughter named Janet, who is learning music, being

supported at school by one uncle living at John o' Groats and one aunt in the Isle of Wight.

"So no more about her. My four pounds is going to last a long while. I am out every day to new places to try and sell my book. The sergeant goes with me and shows me likely shops. One day I went to a thing called a 'Jersey treat,' but it was rather noisy, so I came away. The people there would not even look at my book. But it was not in the island of Jersey, as you might think, nor even in Alderney nor Sark. Cows come from Alderney, but there are none in London that I have seen. There are milk-boys, though, and at this moment I see one fighting with the butcher's boy. The butcher's boy won, and kicked over the other boy's milk-can. But he has just gone across to the County Council drinking fountain. He is a faithful milk-boy, and will serve his patients whate'er betide. I never knew what they were for before—the street fountains, I mean.

"Myn, London is bigger than you or I thought. Mostly people take no notice of you. But when they do it is generally to cheek you. But, as I go about a lot with a sergeant of police, I don't often get cheeked. And in the house, of course, belonging to one of the officers of Her Majesty's force, everything is quiet and orderly.

"I like Mrs Sands very much, and I believe that the uncle at John o' Groats and the aunt in the Isle of Wight are, both of them, very nice.

"I hope I shall sell the book. When I do, I will let you know. I shall not come back by boat. I have no desire to ride upon the deep—or upon the shallow either, if you ask me. Both are too confoundedly jumpy.

"I will tell you the rest when I come.—Yours,

"S. Brown."

Now, privately, I thought that a pretty good letter,

as you would if you had had the fag of writing it. But the needle-peak of the Nicaraguan volcano seen in the old oblong stamp was not in it with Myn for sharpness.

She had read my letter. Oh, yes, of course, but she had picked up all the bits I had slurred over, and had simply turned me outside in, like you do a pocket to get the crumbs out of the corner.

"DEAR SAM BROWN" (Myn wrote),—"I am glad that *my* four pounds will last you a long time in London, but sorry that you have not yet sold *my* book of stamps. Please remember me to Miss Janet, who takes singing lessons, and tell her that I would like very much to go to one of her 'Jersey treats.'—Yours truly,

"MILLICENT HALLAMSHIRE SYKES."

My, but wasn't Myn grand, and didn't she take the starch out of Mr Samuel Brown! The letter was Myn all over, and brought me up all standing—quicker than any Westinghouse brake that ever was adjusted.

Yes, I *was* using Myn's money; it *was* her book I was there to sell; and I had no business to be at Jersey or any other treats with Jenny Sands and her friends!

At first I was angry with myself, called myself all sorts of names, and thought of going back with the boat after all. But just then I remembered my vow. It is wrong to break vows—"better not to vow at all than to vow and not to pay." Isn't it something like that? Used to get it all at Sunday School, driven into my head with a pocket Bible that had brass corners (teacher's name, Ephraim M'Kill, gone to

heaven long ago—I hope). So, as I had vowed not to return by sea, I would tramp it if I couldn't sell the book—yes, every single foot, weary and sad and worn—me, Sam Brown.

Then quite suddenly I felt myself getting angry with Myn. What right had she to dictate to me? Had I not done everything I could? Risked prison and judgment? Been attacked by the Frowsy Man with the telescope neck? Snatched Myn's property from the thievish hands of the mixed Oriental? I stamped between each of these sentences, till Mrs Sands, accustomed to the footgear of the force, sent up to know if I could not get my boots on. There was a flag-stone in the back kitchen specially put in for that sort of thing, and the houses in Wellington Street East, Elephant and Castle, were not constructed to accommodate circus performances on their upper floors!

This was the message I got. It was Jenny Sands who delivered it. However, I don't know how much of it she made up, but though a kind of critic in my own way, I failed to catch her mother's style in it. It was more like the young ladies of the Jersey treat, and she stood at the door looking as pretty and impudent as a blue tit defending its rights to half a coconut swung on a pole in the winter time. We have them in our garden when it snows—coconut, not Jenny Sands, I mean.

"What's that?" she said sharply. "Let me see."

And she held out her hand for Myn's letter.

I was so amazed that I actually gave it her. Clean, brassy cheek like that, cheek armour-plated and riveted, with 12-inch guns in four turrets—*Dread-*

nought cheek, in fact—always comes it over me—from a girl, I mean. I am a bashful boy by nature, except when led away by "Green Books." But with other boys I can hold my own—"bashful" having then quite another sense. I thought Myn was a case. But Miss Janet Sands, singist! Well, she took the cake-oven.

She stood in the passage, frowning at the letter as she turned so that the light might fall upon it better.

"Hum," she said over her shoulder, "writes not badly for a little country milk-maid to her little country boy-boy!"

"I dare you to speak——" I began angrily.

"Of another Jersey treat!" she hummed, beating time on Myn's letter with her finger-nails. "Well, then, I won't. It shan't be scolded again by its girl—so there."

Then she read Myn's letter again, and, folding it carefully, handed it back to me.

"The little thing is jealous," she said lightly; "she doesn't know how much good we are doing her four-leafed clover!"

And she shook her head solemnly over good intentions so badly requited. Then quite suddenly she held out her hand and said, "Never mind, come down to breakfast. Eggs and bacon are harmless, anyway. You can bet your boots, the very ones you were stamping with just now, on that elemental fact, as Jack Haslip would say."

"Who is Jack Haslip?"

"Oh," said Jenny, carelessly, "he is a sort of cousin of mine, who has gone to the West Indies——"

"For his health?" said I, meaning to be ironical.

"No, for the health of the natives — he is a doctor!" retorted Jenny, promptly.

"Oh!" said I, seeing with a curious relief the figure of an old gentleman with white side whiskers like Dr Romer, of the East Dene Hospital. Though why it should have mattered to me I can't, for the life of me, see. So we went downstairs hand in hand —that is, so far as the turn of the stair railings (which could be seen from the kitchen). And all the time Jenny went on telling me about how she was getting on at the music school, and what they made her learn and how hard it was only to have a small cottage piano to practise on. But now in her turn I could see through her. She didn't want me to talk about the Dr Jack, whose name had slipped out before she knew it, and one of his white whiskers after the other began to fade away, and a moustache began to come; I am sure he was a beast.

However, breakfast was all right, and I ate it with good appetite. Then by the time I finished, Jenny had done tittivating at the glass in the pantry. She put on her hat, a little grey one with a white feather at the side, picked up her music, struck a little attitude, and said, "There!"

So we went out into the cool, clean-swept streets. There were few people about, for the morning's rush was over.

"Father left word you were to meet him at Vine Street," she said as we mounted on an omnibus, "so you can come with me all the way."

Then a man came round to collect fares, and I

wanted to pay hers, but she snapped out, "No, no; Jersey-Myn treat to-day," and gave her two pennies to the conductor, as charmingly independent as Mr Bernard Shaw himself.

"What do you mean?" I turned upon her.

"Tuppens, please!" said the conductor, gruffly, bored; "this young lady has only paid for herself!"

"Jersey-Myn treat, sir!" said Jenny to the conductor very gravely as I hauled out my coppers. Then fearing he was being played with, the man ejaculated, "Oh—ah!" And so betook himself to his platform, from which he continued to watch us suspiciously.

"What do you mean by a Jersey-Myn treat?" I demanded, with some hauteur.

"I pay my own fare—Myn pays for yours!"

This was more than I could stand, and I said, "No, Myn doesn't! It is a joint-stock concern. I started the business, and if Myn has put in four pounds for the expenses here, it is only because I had to give all *my* money to my mother."

"Oh," said Jenny Sands, quickly, like one whose joke has turned out not to be so very funny after all, "then your father—yes, I see" (glancing at the little band of black on my sleeve)—"I ought to have known—I am sorry, Sam—please forgive me!" And when she put out her hand and started to look at me like that with her eyes, all wet and sorrowful, just like a cow's—well, I forgave her, wishing, however, it had not been on a bus. 'Most any fellow would! It's no good keeping up spite against a girl who is sorry that way. If she just keeps on looking at you, you

begin to get the impression that she is all eyes, and it makes you feel—well, just wiggly, like cold shape.

"Time to get out, you two!" cried the conductor, who had been eyeing us spitefully, "unless you want to go to the *Bank*—and that's another fare!"

So we got out, and I said I would go and find her father.

"If you like, you can come and take me home at four," she said. "I am sorry I was mean. I might have known!"

Half turning, she waved her roll of music at me and was gone. I did not think the minute before I would ever have been willing to take her home again —not after Myn's letter. But when she said that about being sorry, I was ready—even keen. Girls *don't* play fair—though Jenny Sands was a good deal more of a holy fraud than Myn, as you shall hear.

Then I had to go to Vine Street and meet the sergeant.

"Well," he said, "I think I have got you fixed this shot. I know a man who is interested in French stamps. Come along, I have got just twenty minutes to be off duty."

At first I could not make out where we were going, only every minute or two, at the corner of an eastward-looking street, I could see the mass of St Paul's rising more and more mountainous and massive among the smoke. We turned sharply to the left, into a narrow lane, not so wide as some of the new East Dene pavements, and it was with a thrill of the heart that I recognised on the blackened wall the

inscription in blue and white enamel, "PATERNOSTER Row."

A few doors on the sergeant turned into a counting-room, book-littered, parcel-strewn. The clerks checked themselves sharply at sight of his uniform and became attentive.

"Mr Ferdinand in?" said Sergeant Sands.

"I think so—I will see," said a smart despatching-clerk with a pen behind his ear. He disappeared, and I had time to notice on each of the parcels, now rapidly being carried off, the name and style of the famous publishing firm "Ferdinand & Ferdinand."

We were shown upstairs, and presently in a room which looked wonderfully spacious for so small a street, we found a dapper little man like a retired colonel, into whom somebody had unexpectedly injected a good temper. He received us smiling and nodding.

"Well, Sergeant Sands," he said, "very glad to see you. Nothing wrong, I hope!"

"No, sir," said the sergeant, "on the contrary, I think I have found something in your way——"

"Not a young literary genius, I hope," groaned Mr Ferdinand, lifting up his hands; "we have to see about forty a day. But that is not my business! *I* am here to sign cheques and stir the fire."

"No," said Sergeant Sands, taking the precious brown-paper parcel from under my arm, "I understand that you like to collect foreign stamps!"

"Some," said the little dapper man, glancing with restrained interest at the parcel. "What may these be?"

"He will tell you," said Sergeant Sands, "but you can take it from me that it is all right. Inquiries have been made at headquarters which show Mr Brown's absolute right to the book."

"Ah," said the little military-looking gentleman, "let me see." And with a pair of scissors he made the string fly, and was soon nosing his way through my book, snuffing and shaking his head like a terrier at a sandy rabbit-hole.

"I must be going," said my host; "duty is duty, Mr Ferdinand."

"Very well, sergeant," cried the brisk little man, waving him off with a magnifying glass as big as a shaving mirror, "thanks in any event, you have given me pleasure. I am obliged to you—a great pleasure! 'Book of the Bank of France'—hum, hum—very curious, very curious indeed! Not exactly in my way—not the kind of thing—hum, hum, but very curious, very curious!"

And he flitted, as one might say, from flower to flower, butterflying with the good things in a way that did a stamp-lover's heart good to see.

"How much?" he broke out, "how much do you want for this?"

"One hundred pounds!" said I gallantly.

He rose, wrapped up the book in feverish haste, and handed it back to me. "Good-morning," he said, "*good*-morning! But *leave your address!*"

CHAPTER XII

AND MYN!

But though he turned me out, and gave me back my book in a hurry, nevertheless I had hopes of Mr Ferdinand. His name was Gerald, but everybody in London who knew him, I verily believe, knew him as Mr Gerry. Of course I left him Sergeant Sands's address, and I went out with the book as usual under my arm. Once more I was to take Jenny home—I had to, because I had promised. But on one thing I was resolved, like a rock—no Jersey treats!

Well, when I got to the school-yard the girls were there all right—or rather all wrong. For they began again as soon as ever they saw me, joining hands and dancing round me:—

"Hey-ho,—Sam
Just-the-same-Sam!
Same green in his eye,
Likewise on his tie;
And, to save it from harm,
His heart done in brown paper under his arm!"

They thought they were fearful smart, of course, but this time I did not take notice. And by and by Flo Rowlands came up and spoke quite nicely, and

Eustacia Grimes said I was not to mind the girls. They always acted like that to new-comers. But that they did not mean a bit of harm, and that they never did it except to people they liked.

This, by the way, I found out to be pretty true. They took no notice, for instance, of Mr Sleeman, who had once gone there to ask for Jenny Sands—the cheek of him! But they never let on they saw him at all, only got Jenny out by another way. It was Flo Rowlands who told me this.

So I took Jenny home and we sat on the top of the car and didn't say very much. For all the time I wanted information about the West India Islands and Dr Jack Haslip, which she seemed, for one reason or another, very unwilling to supply.

We got off at the Elephant and Castle, and threaded our way across to the entrance of East Wellington Street, S.E., and then it was that I got my first shock. For, standing in the doorway of No. 123 was the identical little dapper military man I had left in his office. He was gesticulating and stamping his foot. I could just see the fringes of Mrs Sands's black lace cap nodding placidly back at him.

"I shall not be able to sleep in my bed," he was saying—"I thought so at the time. But I wanted not to be tempted. I can't get it out of my head—oh, the beautiful book!"

"Well," said Mrs Sands, putting her head past the grimy lintel which had once been cream-coloured, "there he is, sir—but I don't see no book!" The dapper little man with the turned-up moustaches jumped at least a foot in the air.

"Oh, don't tell me that I have missed it—that it is sold!" he cried. "Where is the Book of the Bank of France?"

Suddenly I discovered that I had no longer the slim book done in brown paper under my arm. Certainly I had it when coming out of Jenny's music school. Could I have dropped it? I must have left it on the top of the car!

I am sure that I must have grown pale, as, indeed, who would not? I know that I regularly toppled on my legs. But Jenny quickly picked something out from among her music and handed it to me.

"You were *going* to leave it," she said; "it was just after you had been so anxious to know all about the West Indies. So I picked it up from the seat as you were getting down."

I did not have time to thank her, nor indeed to say a word, before Mr Gerry pounced upon the parcel, undid it with the same ready fling with which he himself had tied it. He turned over the leaves, hissing and saying, "Ah! ah! ah!" at each, tasting it like Old Phil Hallamshire sipping one of his rare vintages.

"Come inside and I will give you the money," he said. "No, it does not go out of my possession again! No, no; I must just do without a summer holiday this year, that's all. But this is better—ah! —ah!—S-s-s-s—ah!"

He was shown by Mrs Sands into the little parlour with the cottage piano, the shells, the wax fruit under a glass case, and the big "Death of Nelson" on the wall. There he paid me over one hundred pounds in

nice, new, crispy bank-notes, and I had to write him a certificate, a receipt, and also a little story about how the book had come into my possession. The name of Millicent Hallamshire Sykes had, of necessity, to come into this. I had just finished and signed this, when I looked up, and there, within a yard of me, looking through the parlour door, was Myn! Yes, Myn, if you please, as calm as one o'clock, and as easy about everything as if she were merely paying an afternoon call.

"Please give me the money!" she said; and, like a simpleton, I handed it over—indeed, it was a matter of course.

"Now," she said to the astounded Mr Gerry Ferdinand, "the other partner will sign as well!"

And sitting down, she pulled off her glove and signed with her father's flourish—"Millicent Hallamshire Sykes"—adding the date across the stamp just as Old Phil would have done.

"Now introduce me!" she said, rising to her feet; "this lady whom I met at the door—Mrs Sands, is it not? Or the aunt from the Isle of Wight?"

Did you ever hear of such a girl as Myn? I say plump and plain that I never did. She bowed to Mr Ferdinand, who now cared for nothing but to get his treasure safely home. He wrapped it up, placed it in the inside of his coat, and was soon off down East Wellington Street, looking from side to side for a hansom, and only showing his internal jubilation by a little hop-and-skip on the pavement, as if it had occurred to him to dance, but realising his surroundings, he had thought better of it.

But Myn—how had she come there? And what was going to happen now that she *was* there?

Well, of course, I introduced Myn all round, and I thought from former experience that she and Jenny would have flown at each other's throats. Only girls are so made that they never do the same thing twice. Once I thought that I could pretty well tell beforehand what Myn would do. But I know better now. It is no use even trying.

All Jenny said was just, "Will you come upstairs and take off your things?"

"Thank you," said Myn; "I shall be very glad for a little while. I told father where I was going, and he will be all right at the hotel. He has piles of papers before him."

So they went up together, like two long-lost sisters. But I was wretchedly nervous. I thought the storm was bound to come. So, making an excuse, upstairs I crawled and into my room, which was next to that in which Myn and Jenny were. I wanted to prevent murder if I could. Their little hands were never made to tear each other's eyes. Not only would it have put the late Dr Watts in the wrong, but it would have been a pity, too, for both had rather fine ones.

Though the houses in East Wellington Street, Elephant and Castle, are not of the most solid construction, I could hear little—indeed, astonishingly little. They were whispering—that was all I could be sure of.

"Now for it," I thought; "the thunderbolt is coming!" But I only heard two chairs pulled up

closer, and the whispering went on as before. Occasionally I caught a word.

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Really!"

"You will?"

"Course I will. D'you think I'm a little fool? We're not *all* like that in East Dene. It serves him right!"

That was Myn, of course. "Him" was me, and she and that Jenny girl were up to some of their larks. Then there was another long interchange of confidences, unfortunately spoken too low for me to benefit by it.

And then, clear as two silver bells ringing over still water, their united laughter pealed out—that's Green Book talk—they laughed, anyway, and I was dead sure it was at me, and that I had not heard the end of it yet.

"Come on, let's go down!" It was Jenny this time who spoke.

Then Myn called out, as Jenny was making for the door, that she would like to understand about the arrangements a little more exactly. Which was just as well for Sam Brown, insomuch that it gave that eavesdropper—unsuccessful as mostly—a chance of retiring on tip-toe downstairs.

You would never have thought, to see them come in, that these two had been plotting mischief. Two pussies just finished with the cream jug could not have looked more innocent. Moreover, they entered arm in arm as if one had known the other all her life.

That's girls. Now if it had been a pair of boys, each would have slunk in separately, as sulky as Monday-morning school—that is, even if they hadn't fought. And if they had—well, you could have told that too easy enough.

Then Sergeant Sands came in and I introduced Myn as "my partner—my business partner"; and, funny thing, he seemed to know all about Phil Hallamshire and Mr Grandison! These police in London do know a lot. And he even knew where Old Phil was staying. Afterwards I found it was on account of the inquiries that had been made as to whether I had a right to the stamp-book or not.

Well, we had tea, after which Mr Sleeman came in. Whereupon the girls froze up all in a minute. They got out patterns of embroidery, and sat whispering in the corner to compare them, leaving Mr Sleeman to the sergeant and Mrs Sands. Mrs Sands was all right to him, and indeed rather polite—that is, in comparison with the others—but he kept all the time looking over at Jenny and Myn as if he wanted to go over there. But they, in their turn, kept on taking not a bit of notice.

After a while Myn said that she must be going, because her father would have finished his letters by that time and would be getting anxious about her. So Jenny said that she would go too, if I were going. And at that word Mr Sleeman picked up his hat and asked if he might have the pleasure of accompanying the party. But before the girls had time to reply, however, the sergeant put in his oar.

"With all that money in the possession of one of

the partners," he said, casting a humorous eye across at us, "I think I had better make an exception and see it into a place of safety!"

"Father is not to know about it, mind!" cried Myn. "It is for the business, and to help Sam to take his father's place!"

"I understand—I understand!" said the sergeant, soothingly. "But a sealed packet, now, marked with something about stamps. Then let me give it to your father at Forfarshire's Hotel to put among his valuable papers—that will be the safest way!"

And he went and sealed up the notes on the spot, with an official stamp he took from his pocket. Then he said to Mr Sleeman, who was getting ready to accompany us: "Better stay and keep mother company, Sleeman! I will see to these young people myself."

And he did, you had better believe it. It was no fun at all on the car. The girls sat in a corner by themselves, and then came the sergeant and then me. They whispered the whole time—that is, the girls did. I never had a word or a look, but little I cared!

An astonished man was Phil Hallamshire Sykes when the door was opened and we filed in. But blood tells—or Radicalism, or maybe both together. Anyway, he shook hands with us all and fairly beamed upon Jenny—wherein he showed his discrimination.

"Sergeant Sands," he said—"oh, yes! I have had the pleasure of hearing from you occasionally. I remember the correspondence."

Myn frowned. Evidently she did not want him to remember it too exactly.

"May I ask you, sir," said the sergeant, with deference and a careful choice of his words, "to take charge of this packet, which I believe is of some value, and has to do with postage stamps—a pursuit from which the young in these days seem to derive a good deal of pleasure—mixed, if I may say so, with not a little profit!"

It could not have been better done, being in old Phil's own vein. He willingly accepted the commission, and so bidding Myn good-night we were presently on the cool, grey pavements again, with the electric light making broad splashes of leaf silhouettes all along the Embankment. We walked home, not saying very much, though I was dying to know what the two girls had been making up in the little spare bedroom next to mine. But of course, with the sergeant walking between us, there was not a ghost of a chance.

I could see Jenny, however, at the turnings of the corners, drop a step behind, and apparently form some words with her lips. But for the life of me I could not make out what the word was. Nor did I know till I was going upstairs to bed that night. For as I passed Jenny's door it was open just enough to let that young lady put out her head and call me nearer by a single crooking of her finger.

"Jersey treat to-morrow," she said, nodding and smiling. "Myn's coming!"

"Myn" indeed! So this was what they had been doing all that plotting and planning for. No great shake after all. What was it that the

mountain did — something about a ridiculous mouse?

Anyway, I thought the second Jersey treat just as silly to make a fuss about. But I was to have news of that before all was over and done with.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SECOND JERSEY TREAT

THE second Jersey treat wasn't a bit like the first—not nearly so pleasant and, as it were, united. True, I had sold the Book of the Bank of France, and now old Phil was looking after the cash. So there was nothing left to do but to get away as soon as might be. I ought to have been ever so much happier, but, for some reason or another, I wasn't. It is rum—this being happy. You have everything to make you happy, and you are as dull as a frog in a rock before the stone-breaker cracks him out. And then again, perhaps in church, or after some awful misfortune, you feel as chirpy as a sparrow in a September farm-yard. There's no way of knowing beforehand—and afterwards—well, it doesn't matter. Something else equally unexpected is sure to come along, and then you forget everything about what went before.

But there is the Jersey treat to tell about. I never could have believed that Myn would have behaved so. The deceitfulness of girls! I was never more disappointed in my life.

You see the last time that we had a Jersey treat there was nothing but the five girls. Quite enough, says you, for a fellow of my age and modesty. True, but this time there were the same girls, with a lot of

other fellows as well—some with moustaches, and all older than myself. We were to go down the river to a place called Greenwich, very respectable, where the ministers of London go to take fish suppers—though why they go so far away for what they could get so much better at home, I don't know. But—if they had been East Dene ministers, I can tell them that their congregations would never have stood it. However, I suppose London ministers are different.

Well, to Greenwich we went, and if you will believe me, there was one young man too many—seven fellows for six girls! And I—Sam Brown—was odd man out. No one in all East Dene would have believed it. I could not believe it myself.

The boys (I will not call them men) were all learning music, as I was informed, in another academy—which seemed to me a silly thing for boys to do. Music is for girls, and everything wearing trousers gets as far off as possible whenever they begin practising. But these were smart Jacks, all dikkered up with high collars and green fluffy ties that blew in the wind. They twirled their moustaches, if they had any—and pretended to if they had none.

They seemed to take to Myn astonishingly, and, what I could not have believed, Myn talked to three or four of them at once like a house on fire. We were on a dirty kind of boat going down the river, and there really were a lot of interesting things to see as you went down—the Tower, the old green wharves Dickens wrote about, and the big ships being tugged upstream. But, you see, I got no sort of proper comfort out of those, the way Myn was going

on—laughing, and every little while looking up like a duck that has just had a drink, at some miserable whipper-snapper that I could have taken between my finger and thumb and made chewed string of.

Oh, don't make any mistake. Jealous—not a bit of it. Quite the contrary.

I was only disappointed in Myn—sorry for her too. For myself I did not care. It was beneath me. *I* had borne the burden and heat of the day. *I* had sold the Book of the Bank of France. While as for these fellows, what had they ever done? "Do—Ray—Me—Fah"—that was the amount of it—yes, and twisted imaginary moustaches. There was one fellow who was particularly offensive. He talked falsetto as if his voice were sitting astride the roof of his own head. His subject of conversation was "country oafs," and his advice that Myn should come and settle in London and "be one of us." He said clearly and plainly "hus," and that was the only comfort I had—that, and the thought of Old Phil Hallamshire's face if he saw the crew.

Barring Myn, Jenny Sands, and one or two of the girls, there weren't really any passable people on board among the passengers. The rest were bounders, *and* conceited—why, conceited is really no word for them. They gave you the creeps.

Jenny Sands came over every now and then from the young man to whom she was talking, and asked how I was getting on, remarking very superfluously that Millicent seemed to be amusing herself. I replied, "Ah, yes!" in a voice which would have given points to the best Hamlet who ever moralised

in the place of skulls—that is, of dead hopes and broken vows. (Pretty good this—got it out of a Green Book—don't tell.—S. B.).

Then Jenny would go over to where Myn sat, never looking at me, but only up at the young moustache-twisters (*I* could have twisted necks better), and as she leaned over the seat Myn would bend back her head. She had the kind of neck that is called swan-like, though it's not a bit like a swan really, or anything but a girl's neck. Then the two of them would whisper and giggle till they nearly dropped off the ship. Oh, they thought I didn't know, but of course they were laughing at me and at the ridiculous figure I cut.

But I did not mind. I had had enough. Only I never thought it of Myn, and as for Jenny Sands—well, though a pretty fair writer, I really could not undertake to put my feelings for her at that moment into black and white.

By and by we came to Greenwich. It was just a pier with a pretty battered-looking old inn at the end, a lot of loafers, and a smell of fried fish—that is, till you got up a street and found the palace with lots of old salts and boys kicking balls about in the play-ground. The rest had all hurried on, but I lingered behind, watching the fine old hospital, and pacing the resounding colonnades with my hands behind my back, like Napoleon at Fontainebleau. High above, somewhere in the park, I heard the shouts of happy laughter, and realised that my youth was over. But that stern dignity, which is the birthright of every man, came to my assistance. I turned at the corner

and looked out upon the river. I thought of Cæsar and Queen Elizabeth and Bill Sikes and Mr Gladstone —oh, and lots of others who had ploughed that proud stream, and whose misfortunes——

"Hallo, Sam Brown, where have you got to?" said a voice in my ear. And there, within a yard, was Jenny Sands. I thought for a moment it was Myn, and—I will be honest—my heart gave a great hop. But it was only Jenny, but pretty as a brass door-knocker.

"Myn sent me to look for you," she said; "and, I say, what's the matter? You've been crying—there is a tear on your cheek now!"

"It's a—*mistake!*" I said hotly. But I meant to say a shorter word. Then she looked at me a good while with eyes that had the funny shine in them—sorry for me and yet laughing all at a time—you know the sort. If you don't, you will.

Then she took me by the arm and gave it a great tug, like a boy might have done, turning me right round. I did not think she had the strength.

"Now look at me," she said; "no, not at the pavement, nor yet out at the river. Regard me—*me* —I am quite worth it! Deny it if you dare."

I had to look. So would really anybody. You see she had a kind of fascinating way with her. Then she pronounced slowly, separating the words, and making them emphatic with her finger, pointing directly at me.

"You—great—SILLY!" That was what she said.

I could only look and say nothing. She shook me again.

"Wake up!" she cried, "or I'll get the girls to sing to you. You are a great donkey! Don't you understand *yet?*"

I shook my head, but her tone, for all that, was distinctly comforting. Then Jenny Sands took my arm and led me away round the corner. I could see the grass and trees of the park all blurred-like, and the dome of the Observatory, the one which makes ships sail as they ought (on account somehow of longitude) all wobbling about. For the third time Jenny gave my arm a sort of quick hug.

"Don't!" she said in a low, level whisper. "I will tell you all about it. I ought to have done it before. You and I were good friends, eh, Sam? But I am going to marry Jack Haslip some day, when he gets back from the West India Islands. I know I should have told you this before—at once, in fact. But in London girls don't do that very often—at least not at the Academy of Music. It gets you laughed at, and they put tickets on your back—'This lot sold,' and things like that. Besides, you were all wrapped up in your stupid stamps, and I thought you would be none the worse of a good shaking up. But then when Myn came, she was going to be angry with me—that is, till I told her all about Jack. And then, of course, she laughed and said that you would be none the worse of a lesson."

"It does not matter," I said wearily. "*You* think my stamps stupid, and Myn——"

I pointed away up the long grey slopes of the park with my finger, meaning that Myn was having the best of times there and never thinking about me at all.

Jenny Sands looked at me with a kind of admiration that was almost fervent.

"The sooner you get away to the North the better," she said drily. "London is not good for your health, dear boy—too little grass, no cabbages."

Then she gave my arm another good shake. I was getting used to it by this time.

"Oh, I wish I were stronger," she hissed, stamping her little foot; "I would shake you properly! You need it!"

But she had really done rather well as it was.

I could not think what the girl was getting at. My own attitude, indeed, was distinctly noble and pathetic—a sort of good middle betwixt Hamlet and the fellow with the plume in *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Then Jenny drew me quickly into a portico, where it was dusky even then.

"See here," she said, "you are a nice fellow, Sam Brown, and I am taking all this trouble because I like you. Don't think yourself very clever, and keep out of London for ever so long. Now I am your big sister, and just chock-full of good advice. Listen carefully. There is a big tree out yonder, with some bushes and a seat. Jack and I used to sit there and talk about yellow fever and West Indian earthquakes. Now it is my idea that if you go straight there now —*now*—somewhere in the vicinity you may find something to your advantage!"

I knew that she meant Myn, and so almost without stopping to thank her I was starting out for the little copse.

"Sam," she said softly, calling me back, but not moving out of the shadow of the porch herself, "don't you think you owe your big sister something?"

I looked at her just once, and I knew as well as if it had been printed on her brow, that Jenny meant I ought to give her a kiss.

"Would Jack——!" I began.

"Oh, Jack!" she answered lightly, meaning, as we say in the North, that it was a far cry to Loch Awe—or the West Indies.

Now gratitude has always been one of the best and strongest points of my character, and on this occasion I hope that I showed myself at the height of my reputation. Then, afterwards, Jenny went away dabbing her eyes, which (to tell the truth) has made me think ever since. But before she was out of sight she turned, smiling more sweetly than I had ever seen her.

"Good-bye," she said, "good-bye, Sam. I advise you to take the Myn Treat back by the first boat. I will bring along what is left of the Jersey sometime in the evening."

And she waved her hand and ran away. I went towards the big tree she had pointed out, and after I had followed some silly twisty little paths that popped out and in like rabbits at the mouth of a warren, I saw Myn sitting reading a book on the seat Jenny had talked about as the one where she and her West Indian doctor had sat and yarned about volcanoes. Myn never looked up, not even when I plunged right across the grass, fell over a notice-board telling

me that trespassers would be prosecuted, and—took Myn in my arms.

She stood up and shook me off indignantly, as who would say in a theatre, "What loathsome toad doth me annoy?"

"Myn!" I gasped.

"Sir?" said she, as chill as a Polar expedition in January.

"Don't be silly, Myn," I cried. "I know all about it. *I forgive you!*"

She was not quite prepared for this, and all her high-falutin dropped off like a pasteboard mask when the elastic breaks.

"It was that Jenny Sands who told you?" she said, half putting the question and half answering it herself.

I nodded triumphantly.

"Of course it was," said I. "She told me not to be silly and sulk; also that you did not mean it a bit, and that you were waiting for me here!"

"I never was!" cried Myn, indignantly, trying, as it were, to get the elastic of the mask fixed up again.

But I was too wise to allow that. I did not give her time.

"Oh, yes you were, Myn," I said, "you know you were; you and Jenny had it all arranged beforehand!"

"Miss Sands may have arranged it," said Myn, with much dignity, "but as for me, I had nothing to do with it. I was only—sitting a little retired for the sake of quiet, and—in fact—for the sake of quiet."

"Then shall I retire?" I said, adopting her grand

manner, "and leave you with your quiet? As for me, I am going home by the first boat from the pier down there, so you can have all the quiet you want."

I had started to go, but—girls are so alike in some things, yet not one of them like another in others—just as Jenny did, she called me back.

"Hold on, Sam!"

I held on.

"*Sure* you don't love her?" she said. I was certain.

"Sure you never loved her just a little bit?"

"*Cert!*" I used our school contraction by a sort of instinct.

"And you never—?"

"No, never!" Then with a faint reminiscence of a Gilbertian song, under my breath I added, "well, hardly ever!"

"Well," said Myn, gathering up some scarves, gloves, and the book, "I don't really think I care about staying here to go back with these people. We shall take the first boat to London, and be at the hotel in time to give father his tea when he comes in."

Myn was a good daughter—when it suited her.

And we were. It was, in fact, pretty nice coming home in the afternoon glow, into the big, smoky city. The boat looked quite clean now, and I never minded one of the grimy old sheds or wharves. I did not care a bit about the shipping, or the bridges, or even the Tower.

Neither did Myn. We had a good long old-fashioned talk, and the sea air (or something) had

made her hair crispy and her eyes friendly and shiny. It was all pretty good.

But still better, I thought, was old Phil Hallamshire's voice which welcomed us, with its North Country accent. "Well, you two—glad to see you back. I hope you have not fallen out by the way!"

He meant it for a joke, for he said, "Ha, ha!" afterwards. You always knew his jokes that way. But neither Myn nor I said, "Ha, ha!" We only tucked into our tea and scrimmaged on the sly for the last bun with sugared lemon on it.

Neither of us ever thought of Jenny—at least I don't think I did more than once or twice.

CHAPTER XIV

THE STAMP CADGER

When we were once on our way back to East Dene, Myn soon made her father fish out the envelope with the money for the Bank of France Book. You trust Myn for that. Besides, Old Phil wasn't one of your grabbing kind. He wouldn't have cared if there had been a million pounds in that envelope if the million wasn't his. He looked after it because it had been given him so to do, the same as if it were one of Grandison & Co.'s letters containing a cheque to bearer. But he never thought of looking inside, or even squeezing it with his fingers and trying to guess the contents.

Now when we got back to East Dene, you cannot think how nice everything looked! I tell you what—only to see the fields really green and the big blue estuary all dotted with ships, and the ferry boats coming and going, each on a little curve with some spilt cream behind it—well it was prime, almost like the first dish of new potatoes that comes before the strawberries are ripe. Everything is greener up in the North. There is a catch in the air like good soda-water drunk from the bottle. And then the Cheviots spread out along the horizon with the shadows of the clouds so jolly upon them—all so

mixed, that I will eat my head if you could tell which is cloud or shadow or hill sometimes, even when you have been brought up looking at them as I have been.

It was an awful sell for Myn when she had to come down first-class, in a compartment with only old Phil Hallamshire Sykes banked up behind his newspaper, and Myn at the window yawning her head off, till her face looked like an empty oyster-shell with teeth. But as for me, having, of course, only a third-class ticket, I was in a carriage that was open from end to end. I could see everybody. I could shift about, and show off the packets of stamps I had. I kept sticking them on to sheets of thin cardboard with hinges, and jotting prices above to get all in readiness for the trade we were going to do in East Dene and Thorsby.

Well, all sorts of things happen in a railway carriage, or used to when I was young. First a big and burly father of a family came and sat beside me. He asked questions. What were stamps for? How many had I? He had heard of a reward for a million. He had heard also (and this was strictly private) that the Sultan of Turkey or Turkistan—he was not sure which—had been offering a reward for whoever would send enough to cover all the walls of his harem! Good joke that! Who was to stick them on? Oh, yes, he had been told that too. It was the Sultan's wives—to give them something to do. And they were to work them up all in a pattern like the Sultan's prayer-carpet—different colours, you know. That was the great thing about collecting stamps, to have

them of different colours. He gave me this hint in a low suppressed voice, as if he were telling me something which would assuredly make my fortune.

"Have them of different colours, my boy—as many colours as possible."

And nodding his head genially to me he went off to tell his wife of what great service he had been to a young man anxious to make his mark in the stamp world.

"Nothing like a little common sense, my dear," I heard him say, "the young man was grateful—oh, most grateful for the hint. He had never thought of it before!"

His wife, apparently accustomed to adore, looked up at him and said, "Of course not, William, how could you expect it? He is young and has not had your experience of the world."

William said kindly that in the circumstances he would not expect it, and catching my eye, nodded and beamed again to let me know that he wasn't proud.

Then presently a fidgety lady who sat opposite moved one place nearer to me. I never saw such a woman. When she wasn't putting on her glasses, she was hunting for them. She had two pairs, one for reading and the other for looking out of the window. Both were on long hair guards generously twined round her neck, and the way that these four strings got tangled up was a caution. It was like the mayor of East Dene making a political speech. Then she had a small black leather bag out of which she took smelling-bottles, handkerchiefs, bits of cob-

webby fancywork—Lord knows what all, in fact. And she scattered them abroad on the seat, down the back, on the floor and underneath everything that had an underneath. She got out a book and read as much as six lines. Then she laid it down face to the seat, made a grab for something else, when down on the floor went the whole bag of tricks, book and all, and there on her knees was the nervous lady looking for them with her 25 H.P. Long Distance glasses. So breathing blessings, I was compelled to lay aside my stamps and help to pick them up.

I did this at least half-a-dozen times. Then I shovelled them all pell-mell into the bag and turned the key, which was hanging to the handles by a cord. With one quick jerk I snapped the string and put the key in my pocket. I would give the lady that key when she got to her journey's end—not before.

I did not intend to acquire curvature of the spine howking under the old girl's petticoats for jujubes and tatting-needles. Art is long and stamps are fleeting—that is, if you don't keep an eye on them. Phillips says so and he ought to know. So I helped to look for the key of the black bag—oh, you bet I looked—and as it wasn't found, she came nearer to me, in order to watch me at work. She had nothing to do now except to play cat's cradle with the hair chains of her glasses.

But quite suddenly she remembered that her nephew Artie was very fond of stamps. I seemed to have a lot. She wondered what I did with so many.

"Sell them!" said I, sticking a row of Austrians pretty close together and bracketing them a penny

for some forlorn kid or other. Austrians are not favourites of mine, somehow. No enthusiasms about Austrians! Though I will say there is good fun hunting over a bushel or two looking for Mercury heads. But in those days we did not care for Mercury heads—hardly thought they were right stamps, in fact. Any fellow would have swopped a dozen for a Hong Kong, because Hong Kong was so much farther away.

"Sell them!" cried the lady, holding up her hands, "do people spend money on such things?"

I said that sometimes people so far forgot themselves as so to do.

"But not Artie—not my nephew Artie," she said in a tremulous voice, "you don't know dear Artie! not my nephew Artie! Artie never *bought* a stamp in his life. He has asked for every one of them, and had them all given to him. That is what I call a stamp-collector."

This sort of riled me, as it would most anybody in the trade. "It is what I call a stamp-cadger!" I answered, very staccato.

"A what?" shrilled the poor lady, to whom Artie was heart's darling and general non-such. I abhor all non-suches.

"A stamp-cadger," I repeated firmly, "a regular pest to society. Stamp-cadging ought to be put down by Parliament. Or if the law will not do anything for us, I am afraid that Artie will come to a bad end—a sudden one, too. Some firms are ordering cadger-traps by the dozen. And now that wolves are dying out, they are sending over old wolf-

traps from the Continent. Artie had better take care."

Artie's aunt threw up her hands and apparently supplicated a safe passage through all perils of cadger-traps and second-hand wolf-traps for her beloved. Then she said suddenly—

"Artie shall give up collecting—I will see him this evening!"

I had gone on peacefully making up my sheets and keeping my face straight as Myn had taught me how. So the good lady never suspected I was getting at her. I felt that I could afford to be generous, so I said, "Here is my address. I live in East Dene, and if your nephew has anything in his collection worth while, I—my firm, that is—will most willingly purchase from him!"

And for the first time in my life I gave the address of the now celebrated name and style of "MEE & MYN, LIMITED."

She said that her nephew would call upon "us" with his collection, but that, as he was a reckless youth, we were not to give him more than five or six pounds at a time. I promised at once not to do so. This I did with perfect safety, for I never knew a stamp-cadger's collection yet that was worth as many shillings—I mean unless he began to cadge away "at the Back o' Beyont," as they say in Scotland.

When at last I got rid of her by shifting to a vacant window-seat where (as I pretended) I could see better, the Fidgety Lady thanked me for my promise, and gave me her own address so that I could send the money for dear Artie's collection direct to her. She

would put it in a savings' bank and take care of it for him till his twenty-first birthday. But I had my doubts. If she took no better care of it than she had done of the contents of the black bag, Artie would not be rich when he came of age. Besides, Myn and I meant to sell all we could, but to buy only when we could not help it. That is what all the big dealers do, though they don't all put it so badly as that.

However, virtue was rewarded, for right beside me in my new place sat a quiet-looking man who said nothing for a long time; only I could feel that his eyes were on my fingers, and once when I turned a Wurtemberger upside down, he put his hand forward as if to rectify the mistake.

Then he began presently: "Did I hear you saying that you were going to sell these stamps?"

So I told him that I was, and he said I was young to be going into business by myself. So I told him about father, and how I had somehow to get my learning and support mother as well. He seemed pretty interested, and said that he lived in Thorsby himself, and that his name was Mr Robert Fortune. He then took my sheets and looked all over them, and one by one, carefully and like one who understood, ticked all the higher priced ones. "Are you willing to sell me those now?" he asked.

"Of course I am," I answered, "but, you see, we have not yet got out our proper sheets for grown people. These were only meant for children, till we get a proper shop or something arranged, that is."

"That does not matter in the least," said Mr

Fortune. "I have some young people about me who have been collecting in a sort of desultory way—frantic about stamps for twenty-four hours and then forget where the album is for a year. But this haul may serve to steady them."

And he paid me out £4, 11s. in plain cash—more than my whole trip had cost me. It was a perfect Godsend. I tried to look *blasé* and don't-care-ative. But he was pretty far-seeing as well as rich, this Mr Robert Fortune, and I think he got on to me. Anyway he sat watching, and occasionally making a suggestion as I worked through my list of counties.

I slipped out at one station where we had twenty minutes, and found Myn's carriage empty, but all Old Phil's things scattered about. So I judged they would be in the dining-room. I had quite forgotten about that—indeed about anything to eat. Myn hadn't though. She had nailed six browned potatoes, a slice of beef, and six sandwiches. How she managed it is a mystery into which I do not care to pry; but I told Myn that she was a good "Co." No head of a firm need wish for a better partner. As for Old Phil, he came out looking as if the station belonged to him, including the station-master and all the engines. So nobody ever thought of suspecting Myn. Why should they? I did not say that Myn *stole* the things for me. No, she only conveyed them off her plate. She might have eaten them if she had liked, but she was more noble, like those fellows in Thessalonica or somewhere, and instead of greedy-toothing them all up herself, she tied them in her

handkerchief instead for me. A proper girl—well, you hear me speaking!

Of course, come to think on it, Grizel Baillie and all the heroines of antiquity did the same thing for their "Co.'s." And they were not, generally, so well employed as I was, earning £4, 11s. by selling bits of dirty paper to a man who knew no better. That's what the fellow says about stamp-dealing who sits in the scorner's chair. Much he knows about it. Very likely he has never earned enough to pay for the smelly stuff on his handkerchiefs.

If he really has anything to say, my name is Sam Brown of East Dene, my fighting weight "fourteen-seven." Everyone in Thorsby and East Dene knows where to find me. Let him come on.

Myn nearly danced when I told her about the £4, 11s. She wanted me to come into the first-class carriage with Old Phil and her, so that we might talk it over comfortably; but, though I respected and reverenced Old Phil, I had no desire to be so long and so continuously under his eye. Besides, there was the ticket-collector.

So we decided on the head of the garden instead.

"But mind you," she said, "no lonely mariners this time—no Green Books!"

"No Biddy Balmers!" I retorted sternly.

"No," said she, "I suppose you have worked off all those passages out of *Love's Rosy Petals* on the singing girls——"

"Did Jenny——" I began, fiercely enough—for I thought she had been giving me away when I had only been improving her literary taste.

"No," said Myn, "there speaks a guilty conscience—Jenny Sands never told me a word except about her doctor from the West Indies. She didn't care the snap of her finger for you, so you needn't think it."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said I, "not a single toffee drop. No more did I care for the whole crowd—though, I will say, that Mrs Sands and the sergeant were pretty decent to me. We must send them something when we get settled as to 'the business.'"

"You have no idea of the solemn way the last words sounded—"The Business." My, it was like the organ in church sometimes, so low that your ears can't hear it, but which makes you shake all inside, the sound batting against the roof and coming back again to hit you where you live.

"Business"—"The Business"—"Our Business"—"Mee & Myn, Ltd's. Business!"

It made a fellow feel good—all sort of cleaned up and sea-bathed, and yes, I have said it before, but I can't think of another word—religious. And Myn and I, sole partners, without thinking how it would look, put out our right hands and looked at each other in the eyes, holding on like wax. I didn't know exactly what to say. I felt that something ought to be said. "Amen," perhaps, or "Dust to dust"—or something like that. But all I could think of was just, "Till death us do part," which I had learned from peeping between the leaves of my prayer-book when sermons were long and dull.

"Till death us do part, Myn!" I said out loud, and I thought it was all right. But in a minute,

before the guard could sound his whistle, Myn's face grew awful red. She threw away my hand as far as it would go—which was not very far, as it was well tacked on at wrist and shoulder.

She didn't say anything, but made straight past me and bolted into Old Phil's compartment, and though I walked two or three times along the platform, and coughed quite loud, Myn kept on staring out of the opposite window. But her near cheek was still pretty high-coloured though. So I guess she had not forgotten me quite as much as all that.

So I went back to my own third-class, and getting on the side where Myn was, I shoved my head out and called "Myn—Myn." For I wanted to explain that I wasn't just dead set on "Till death us do part!" Also that if she liked it better, I was willing to let it go at "World without end," or "M. or N. as the case may be," or, in fact, anything good and solemnising that Myn herself could think of. I was not particular.

But though I was dead sure that Myn heard me, she never so much as put the tip of her nose out, and after the third time of asking, the window of the first-class compartment went up with a slam.

Perhaps Old Phil Hallamshire was afraid of draughts. Perhaps not!

CHAPTER XV

MOTHER AND THE SHOP

AT first my mother would not hear a word of the Shop.

"Put plate-glass in the parlour window! Ye are daft, laddie! And me to sell your nesty stamps in my auld age. I wadna be payed to do the like."

I think she felt that in some obscure way it was an insult to my father's memory, this business of setting up a shop in the house to which he had brought her as a bride. But she had to be convinced. For till we could make some other arrangements, the cottage was the only place we could think of, Myn and I.

So I had to tell mother that if she could not consent I would need to leave my learning, and go to work in Grandison's yards, where the influence of Old Phil would easily get me a place as time-keeper. At this I could see mother's lip wicker. For, as I have said, she was Scotch, and all of that nation have a great respect for education and will do almost anything to get it for their children.

"Oh no—no," she cried. "I will live on dry bread first—I will do anything but beg——"

"You will sell stamps, mother?"

For this she was hardly yet ready, however, and I had to get in Myn to help convince her.

"You see, this is the way that it is," said Myn; "I will come in as often as I can get away and help. There won't be much to do during the day, only when the schools come out, and then I will come straight down. Of course Sam can't, for, being pupil teacher, he has to stay with the Kept-Ins, and that will throw him late."

"But I don't know one stamp from another!" objected my mother.

"That is not the least matter," said Myn, coaxingly; "see, all the packets are priced. So are the sheets. The price is marked above every stamp. When the boys of Johnstone's are looking over them, watch that they don't knock some of the bottom ones off with their sleeves. Ours at Currycomb's won't, I don't think. They are too afraid of Sam. But Johnstone's might be up to tricks!"

"I will see to that," said my mother, some fighting border-blood stirring in her—the traditional hatred of the Marches against the Johnstone clan and name. "I hae *his* stick here. He used to say that it would break the back of a cuddy!" She always spoke of my father as "him" and "he."

Myn nodded approval, and I was called on the scene.

"Your mother is going to help us," said Myn, with her arm round the elder woman's waist, a liberty mother permitted from no other—not even me. She would have given me "a ring on the side o' the heid" if I had ventured on such a thing. Truth to tell, I never thought of it.

But Myn and I were far from being at the end of

our difficulties yet. Mother started new ones every minute. If one is to show stamps for sale, one must have a counter to do it on, and mother flatly declared that we should have none—neither but nor ben, forward the ship, nor, as it were, aft. And she gave her reasons. These, upon analysis, were chiefly that "she was not going to have her parlour dirtied with the clampersome clogs o' a' the loons aff the street! 'Clean them on the mat?' Never! Did ye ever yet see a laddie that cleaned his feet when he ought? Even Samuel there——"

And when my mother called me Samuel, I knew that the case was serious. In my father's time it would have meant a summons behind the stick-house and a whopping. Now it was only the sign of opposition from mother—a sort of danger signal or battle flag flying in her eye. Myn and I looked at one another.

"See, mother," I said, "there is the kitchen end. It is flagged with blue whinstone and won't take any harm from the feet of all the boys in East Dene——"

My mother cried out to stop me as if I had said something wicked.

"*My* kitchen—what are the twa o' you thinkin' aboot?" she cried. "Clean and feat and fit to tak' your dinner aff it has aye been, and so it shall bide."

"But, mother, we must live," I answered; "if there is no other way for it, I must just leave the Academy and go into the Yard!"

That was, with mother, always the clinching argument. Education first—food and drink a long way behind. She sat down and put her apron to her eyes.

I had never seen her do that before, hardly even when father died. And I could see (noticing it for the first time) that the fine apple bloom of her cheeks was full of fine lines crossing and intercrossing, thousands and thousands of them.

"I never thought it would come to this," she said, "that Saturday when *he* brought me here. We bode a week at Berwick. It was what they ca' noo-a-days a honeymoon. We never had a holiday again, but at least my man aye earned his living honest, in the sweat o' his brow. He never thought to see his widow brought down to sellin' wee squares o' paper steamed aff auld envelopes!"

But the fear of my going into the Yard did the business. I do not deny that Myn and I pushed our advantage somewhat cruelly. But business is cruel—even the kindliest sort, and when you have to mix up your own old mother in it. The thing had to be, for the present at least, and Myn and I never gave the dear old lady a chance till all was arranged.

But we did pretty well. We made all sorts of concessions. There was to be no sign over the door—only a brass plate on it, like what doctors have, but a little larger. The sacred name of Brown was to be respected. The inscription was to run:—

MEE & MYN, LIMITED,
Stamp Experts.

It had been agreed between us that, for business purposes, and to throw dust in the public eye, "ME" should be spelt with an extra "E." We found such a name in an old directory, and it was to be understood

that we were "just agents"—at least mother was to be allowed to say so to save her dignity. This cheered her up at once, though I can't for the life of me see where the difference comes in.

However, we made it up to her more seriously when it came to deciding the matter of the counter. Luckily our lobby was a pretty big old-fashioned one, and we arranged a wire grating with struts on which boards could be let down while the fellows were mousing over the sheets and books, mother standing over them with the eye of a hawk and the port of a grenadier to see that nothing went amissing—or, like riches, took wings to itself and flew away. A three-cornered lilac Cape of the second issue did that one day, and mother only caught it with the business end of father's blackthorn. Job Bully of Johnstone's school had a bump on the back of his head for a fortnight. But mother sold the lilac Cape for a shilling, a big price for those days. A fellow at our school named Pretorius, says that the Cape has often been sold since, though never quite so cheap as that. This has something to do with politics, which I know nothing about. But I guess there must be something in it, for Pretorius is a demon at "footer," and nearly good enough to be a "springbok" himself.

Then, having once caught the idea, mother arranged the table in the parlour properly, with seats all round and a nice green cloth. There was a cash desk, in the corner which had been father's. I got her to take the wax fruit out of the window, and put a large album there open in the middle of the shelf. I had a

sheet of extra nice ones in a frame on either side. At first mother would only allow these to lie flat, and, as a matter of fact, I never touched the stamp books or frames, only each day, with a couple of wedges, I hitched up the shelf till it was at a very decent angle for seeing from the outside, and the dark green cloth I had it covered with showed off the stamps first-rate.

Mother did not like it however, and never passed that window if she could help it. She even took short runs when she approached from her marketings so as not to be obliged to see the disgrace that had befallen her parlour window, once on a time so decent and seemly with lace curtains (washed four times in a year) and the wax fruit under the oval glass shade.

The parlour or "ben the hoose" was for the better customers who might like to choose at their leisure. Mother opened a flap and ushered them in like the lady of one of those "stately homes of England" we read about in the poetry book.

We were getting into a difficulty about our stock when Myn came in with a letter from Jenny Sands. It was a first-class letter and I don't think Myn showed herself half grateful enough. But I resolved that *I* would, in spite of that miserable old West Indian doctor. That is, when I got the chance. She was a good sort, Jenny, in spite of her making fun of me and chumming up with Myn to do it.

Jenny said something like this. I don't remember the exact words, for Myn took the letter off to

answer it herself. I never really had it in my hands.

"My father bids me say that he has found a good man who will let you have all the stamps you need at wholesale prices. He can be depended upon. I think father and he are pretty friendly, so I expect that father did something for him that he is not likely to forget. It often happens that way. *I* sometimes do kind things and people promptly forget all about them, but it is different with father. This is the address." (And she gave it). "Father or I will be very glad to do any commissions that you like. And father adds that in any case you had better let the first orders come through him—also let him see the prices charged, and tell him if you are not satisfied. The list is enclosed. Mother sends love, and, as for me, I am ready to stand by as often as wanted.—Yours,

"JENNY.

"*P.S.*—No news from Jack for a month—Boo-hoo!"

Now this was pretty good of Jenny, for, of course, she had her own affairs to attend to—good of Sergeant Sands too, of course. But I knew who it was that had egged him on to doing it. I remembered how Jenny had her handkerchief to her eyes that day when she bade me good-bye at Greenwich Old Park. I wished Myn would have let me answer that letter. I wanted to comfort Jenny because she had not heard from Jack for a month. I hate to have a girl cry, even three hundred miles away.

Well, we got in our stock, thanks to the sergeant and Jenny Sands, and though the prices were certainly all right, the money seemed to run through our

fingers fearfully quick. Besides there was Bickerton, the carpenter, to pay for fitting up the place—quite enough it was, too, though I need not go into the figures lest I become a bore with what, after all, concerns only Myn and me.

But it was done at last, and we had got together a fine lot of "stuff" as we began to call it quite professionally.

All was in readiness for the day of the opening. That, of course, had to be a Saturday to suit the schools. And you can bet your life, there never was an undertaking better advertised, so far as the stamp-buying populations of East Dene and (partially) Thorsby were concerned. Of course, we did not expect much from Thorsby, but I got Old Currycomb to write me an introduction to the headmaster of the Thorsby school—which was bigger than ours. And he did it like a good little man. So when I got there the Thorsby man proved very decent, and after a question or two allowed me five minutes in which to state my case in the big classroom before they sang the Evening Hymn. My speech was a model. You see I had had no time to get it up. I had a printed advertisement in my pocket, which I had counted on the master allowing me to place on the notice-board, and I thought that he might possibly have referred to it himself. But he was a good man and gave me my chance, probably to try me.

As far as I can remember I said, "I don't know if any one of you are interested in the collection of Postage Stamps, but if you are there is a little exhibition of them over at our house in East Dene. I want

you to come. I am Sam Brown, and mother and I are going to show them. We are going to sell them, too, if we can. We are doing this to make money, because we have to. I would far rather keep the stamps for myself, if I could. But you won't be cheated. This is not a charity bazaar, and the stamps are really cheap. No forgeries—prices from six-a-penny. We have also some nice albums for beginners, and I will show anyone all about it if he really cares. Rotters will find themselves in the street pretty quick, but earnest inquirers can count on being told all they want to know, and perhaps a good deal more. I went myself to London to get the stamps, and they have been arranged under the personal direction of Mee & Myn, Limited, the well-known Stamp Experts! First come is first served. So come early and have first pick!"

While I was speaking the headmaster stood by smiling, and then said that he had had a letter from his friend, Dr Curry, who vouched for me in every way, having had a long and intimate acquaintance with my family (in his youth he had whaled my father). And he ended by putting his hand on my shoulder, and giving the word, "Rally round Sam Brown!" So with that the boys gave a rousing cheer, as of course a school always does when the master waves his hand or seems to expect it. I did not count much on that. But he meant to be kind to me, and I thanked him.

Of course a lot of boys were waiting for me when I came out. Some wanted to ask questions—others to have larks with me, and a few to see if I had any

stamps on me to sell. But I wasn't going to spoil the *éclat* of our opening day, not I. But there was one big fellow who thought he could be awful funny. He kept on asking me for an East Dene stamp, and finally as he would not stop, I gave him one . . . in the eye. He sung out and came at me with his arms whirling. He had not heard of me, so I besought them to take him away. I did not want to spoil either my popularity or the shape of his face. But he would not hear reason, so, after all, I was obliged to lay him out comfortable behind the wet-day play-sheds.

I then said I was sorry, but that he had brought it on himself. To which he agreed, and offered me a key-ring, the model of a locomotive with three wheels still working and a toy pistol to teach him boxing.

However, I told him that being in business I could not afford to fool away my time that way, but I promised that for each half-crown's worth of stamps he bought from the firm I would take a turn at the gloves with him in the yard behind. He was a well-to-do chap of the name of Higgs, very cantankerous by nature, but all right after you had reduced him to a common denominator, as it were, with your fists.

After this some fellows from the school came all the way along to the Ferry and saw me on board. Higgs came too, holding a piece of raw beef in a handkerchief which he kept wetting at the street spiggots, first to one eye and then to the other. He turned out pretty decent, not bearing any malice.

Well by eight o'clock that night the firm had done all that it could think of. Myn had warned her father that she mightn't get more than a few minutes in the middle of the day on Saturday, but that if she did not come home he was to take dinner without her. Whereupon Philip Hallamshire Sykes looked rather grave, but when the object was explained to him he simply nodded his head, and directed the maid that something should be kept hot for Miss Millicent. He need not have troubled. Myn was jolly well able to look after herself in the eating line—even to looking after her business partner as well, as witness the beef and browned potatoes she sneaked out of that restaurant at York.

How we fussed that night! It seemed as if we never could be satisfied with the result, or make up our minds which should be the open page—Myn favouring Liberia because they were (then) so scarce, and I Cape of Good Hopes because the colour and shape attracted the eye. We carefully laid aside all British, United States, and the big colonies like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, because most people had relatives in these places. And the customers whom we hoped to please wanted to see something they had never seen before. I wrote short historical notes over some of the best—that is, as much as I knew. Much I guessed at, but as there was nobody to contradict, it went through like a Tory Bill passing the House of Lords.

The great day was at hand. The last thing at night I was to put my lamp into the window and signal to Myn that all was safe. If you know how,

you can do the Morse code quite easy with a cap or even with your hand, and Myn signalled back that all was serene at Old Phil's. So there was no more to do but to go to sleep. I thought I never could. The responsibility was too great. I meant to sit up all night in father's easy chair, but having been on my legs all day, I dropped promptly asleep, only to awake an hour later with all dark, and apparently all the ants in Christendom tickling and itching and crawling inside my clothes. Of course it was only fancy, but it is funny what horrid things clothes are to go to sleep in at night, and how mean you feel when you wake again. This is gospel truth, and you can freeze to it.

I crawled off to bed—pretty softly, you may be sure, so as not to wake mother—and got into bed anyhow. It was black as sin, but I managed it after a bit, though the night-shirt did not quite fit round the neck and there seemed a sort of tightness about the knees.

This was explained when next morning I found I had shoved my legs through the armholes, which was a funny thing, but did not interfere with the purpose for which such things are made. That is, to sleep in. I slept all right—never better. Only I dreamed that I was running a three-legged race, and that the other fellow wouldn't keep step. I rather think I must have kicked that chap.

For the shoulder seams of the night-shirt were busted right out, and mother had some mending to do. She said she never saw such a boy, meaning me. But really it was the other fellow in the three-legged

race who wouldn't keep step. But mothers will go blaming their innocent sons for little things like that —yes, even the best of them.

There is much injustice in this world. Oh, piles and piles!

CHAPTER XVI

"IT IS OUR OPENING DAY!"

As the morning came I awoke to the consciousness of my inverted night-shirt, and the thought that if my father had been alive he might have added a surcharge . . . behind the stick-house. Tears stood in my eyes. Now I regretted even a little thing like that. Boys, take warning by me. Some day you may come to be sorry that you have no longer a father to dress you down. This is a moral, and ought to be entered at Stationers' Hall and set in copybook lines. But I make no extra charge.

Next I ran to the window to see what kind of day it was. It was simply divine. Myn's window blind had escaped at the top where her sash was six inches down, and was walloping out on the breeze like the famous one in the song. So Myn was still asleep.

Away towards the Cheviots a kind of warm mist was rising from dim meadows crowded with larks, etc., etc. (But here my publisher assures me that my next twenty or thirty lines are cribbed from the Green Book called *Love's Rosy Petals*, and that their inclusion would bring him under an action for damages. So I leave them out. The reader need not worry. They were only a description of scenery. But I am sorry, for they looked swell and filled up nicely.)

Anyway I got up and the only trouble I had was with my braces, one thong of which had got broken jumping over our new counter when mother was in the garden. However, I fixed that with some twine and stood ready.

Breakfast was no great feast at our house that morning. My mother prepared it, but her hands were shaking. For within her heart she was as anxious as any of us. One after the other we squinted along the window-sill from each side before drawing up the blind, to see how the show looked. We let down the semicircular counters in the flagged lobby, and put the sheets and books on these—that is, cheap articles, specially strong-built for the kids. Mother lifted up the flap and ushered an imaginary visitor into the parlour. Then I took her once more round the set of old drug drawers, which I had bought cheap from Cruikshanks & Patteson, the chemists, who had been refurnishing. These still bore the old white china plaques under the brand-new labels which I had stuck on with such care, and the packets of "mixed," "used" and "unused" which they contained, smelt, some of "Ipecac," some of pill-dust and some of Spicy Ind.

But all that mother had to know was the price and designation. Even that was hard for her at first. It made her, she said, "feel like going to Joseph Carnochan's again"—meaning a certain schoolmaster in the village of Lochfoot, long since departed to a well-earned repose.

We had at first four sizes and prices of packets: one penny, sixpence, a shilling, and half-a-crown.

On the whole we gave, I think I may safely say, even for that day of incredible cheapness, excellent value. Or rather, more exactly, we were prepared to give. In the corner by the salt tin, we had a till with neat compartments and some change, principally coppers, all ready for the coming customers.

Myn came bolting in, like a rabbit with the dogs after her, almost on the stroke of eight. Her father would not let her go before he had seen her take her breakfast—a proceeding which seemed almost an insult that morning. But she had been spying out of the window to see that we did not pull up the parlour-blind before she came, and had kept running out and in so often that Old Phil at last got tired and sent her about her business—that is to say, ours.

Then mother and she stood in the doorway just inside, while I screwed on the famous brass plate with the name and purport of the firm's being engraved upon it. Of course I had the door back against the wall and Myn and mother, with their skirts well out, hid what I was doing. It was five minutes past by the town clock, but just exactly the hour of eight by station time when I pulled up the blind of the parlour window and showed the new plate-glass with the ranges of stamps within. I also let down the little striped awning outside.

My mother hooked up the brasswork of the counter frames, pulled out the struts and fixed the boards. Myn laid out the books of countries and ranged the sheets and packets. It was a solemn moment, and I don't think any of us wanted to laugh.

We did the next minute, though. For a big soft yokel from the country, who had been early in at the railway with bullocks for Bewick Tryst, popped his head in at the door, and demanded, "D'ye sell baccy?" His accent set us off, and though my mother answered very courteously that we did not keep such a thing, Myn and I laughed till the tears came. We tried to hide our mirth, but the countryman must have seen, for he cried back at us as he was going out, "A precious poor sort of a shop where they don't keep baccy!"

After this a few neighbours strolled past or stood gazing at their doors. The general impression was that Myn and I had gone out of our minds, while the prevailing local feeling was one of pity and sorrow for my mother, a decent woman who had been beguiled into this mad adventure.

In fact I am not at all sure that this was not my mother's own feeling, softened just a little by parental prejudice. We had, however, gone too far to recede. Myn and I took it in turns to walk outside and see how the cottage looked. We agreed that the red geraniums in the kitchen window were entirely unprofessional, and that the brass doorplate would be much better seen during the day let into a panel on the wall. But with these things we did not, in the meantime, trouble mother. We both felt that she was carrying as much as was good for her this first day of our opening.

At nine o'clock we had still to wait for our first client, and at half-past nine Myn and I fell silent, and even began to look a little blue. We did not

own it to each other, but our main thought was—what if the whole thing should prove to be a frost?—Suppose nobody came at all? We should prove to be the laughing-stock of the neighbours! That was not pleasant to think of, and all our outlay gone without recall.

Mother could not sit still. She ran constantly to the little gable window upstairs to see if the saviour of our commercial honour would not arrive.

He came. I knew him at sight. He was a bulgy youngster not long out of petticoats, whom the fact of having a chance uncle in Buenos Ayres had smitten with the stamp fever. Also he was in one of the junior classes, whose feet I had set upon the *via sacra* by permitting them to exchange their pocket-money against such of my exchanges as I had least need of. To which I added a tacit but clearly enough understood protection, so far as my department was concerned, from the cane of Dr Currycomb.

Robb Junior was a grubby, ugly, gutter-paddling young monkey whom my mother, on another occasion, would never have permitted within twenty yards of her door. But now she welcomed him, if not with open arms, at least with beaming smiles.

The country was saved. Honour, at least, was not lost.

Myn and I discreetly retired. It was agreed that to mother should belong the honour of serving our first customer. But she stood there speechless, alarmed before this "lower-second" grub. She could not even find tongue to ask him what he wanted. But the young animal himself was not backward, and

demanded, "As many stamps as I can get for a penny!"

My mother, with Scotch caution, demanded a sight of grub's penny first, and then served him with a "penny mixed—unequalled in any market," as per advertisement. It was done. Johnny Robb was our "first-foot," and he had been generously dealt with, in so far as if he kept that packet ten years the contents could certainly not have been bought for five shillings. For these were the brave days when colonies were little thought of, and our highest ideal was a complete set of recent South Americans.

"Now, Robb Junior," I said as he was departing, digging into his penny packet with an explorer's finger, "mind you and send on the other boys."

At eleven two boys, arm-in-arm, loitered along the street, evidently wondering if they would risk coming over to the window. They could see the albums, and frames of rare stamps laid out. But they seemed to be aware that we three lay in wait for them, like spiders watching the hapless fly with money in its breeches' pockets. For they wandered past with only a languid, careless glance. My mother's thoughts were, I am sure, quite uncharitable, and as for Myn and mine, who knew both boys, they are best expressed in Myn's rapid question, which was half a prophecy, "You will thrash them on Monday for this?" And in my reply, hissed tragically in her ear, "Just you wait!"

Dinner-time came without a single other copper in the till. Not a nibble. Not a rise. The street was swept as bare as the palm of my hand. The boys,

every human being, seemed to be keeping away on purpose. Oh, wouldn't I warm our fellows? But would even that make them come? There was that wretched proverb about taking a horse to the watering-trough, and the impossibility of making him drink when there. Well, I had made our chaps drink—up till now, that is. But they did not seem so ready to commit themselves by coming to my mother's house. Myn was beside herself. After turning the album leaves feverishly, she ran outside on pretence of looking again at the window. Nobody! Sister Ann? No, not a brother, nor a sister, nor the smallest little cub with a possible penny to spend.

At half-past twelve, my mother frankly put her head down on her arms and wept. That, from her, meant a good deal. Myn told me to go out with a gesture of her head. She said something to mother, I suppose, for when I came in they were both pretty moppy, and very grumpy with me—Myn in particular.

Mother did not clasp me in her arms and call me her own darling—her pledge of a dear dead affection. She had not read the Green Books. Lord, no—she told me instead to get out of her road. And that if I could not think of something to help, I need not stand about hindering. Yet I don't know that she knew herself what she was doing. Oh, it was a gay day from start to finish. Yes, my merry men, it was so.

There was now no reason why Myn should not go home for lunch—which was our dinner. No sudden pressure of business, requiring three busy sellers behind the counter, was likely to arrive. But, hope springing

eternal, I was to signal from the gable-window by catching a red rag under the sash, if there were any such urgent need. But of this there seemed only too little hope.

I kept pretty well out of mother's way. She was bent on taking it out of me for having seen her cry. It was all my fault. If it had not been for my nonsense we should still have had wax flowers and fruit in the parlour window, lace curtains behind them, and been much respected in the neighbourhood. It was all my fault if my father's name, which had always been honoured and looked up to, was trailed in the mud. And the brass plate!—She could not think on that brass plate with any kind of complacency. It made her angry. If my father had been alive—and so on. I hope I am a good son. I know I mean to be, but I will say that sometimes mother wearied me, and that specially when I was trying to do my best.

I consoled her with the thought that a certain large, notable and once flourishing city (which sitteth upon Seven Hills) was not entirely built and walled in one day. So neither could we expect that our stamp business would be either.

But I might as well have talked to the winds, to old Canute's tides and the general forces of nature as to mother with an idea in her head. It was a failure. We were a laughing-stock. It was all my fault. And then *da capo*—all about father, the parlour curtains, the wax fruit (now shamefully reposing in the garret) and—crown of all these iniquities, the brass plate, a mockery, a delusion and a snare—I, Samuel

Brown, unworthy son of a worthy sire, the ignoble cause of all.

In all this, however, there was no word against Myn. Partner "MEE" got the brunt of it. But after the third time of asking, Mr Mee grew rapidly indurated, and water does not roll more easily off a duck's back than did the fourth restatement of my iniquities immediately before Myn's return. I was sorry, of course. There was a mistake somewhere. We had miscalculated, that was all. Hitherto I had led the boys by the nose, and at school I had ruled the roast. But somehow by asking them to come and buy the very same stamps at my mother's house, even at cheaper prices, I had put myself in their power—on a holiday too. They ought to have been there, and they were not. On another day I could have driven them in flocks. But Saturday was their day. Freedom (as represented by the boys at Currycomb's) shrieked when Kosciuszko fell. That was me, Sam Brown. And between you and me, though I didn't show it to mother or Myn, this Kosciuszko felt pretty considerable sick.

The successful and celebrated Alpine climber who gets his first information as to the unsympathetic hardness of Mother Earth by tumbling *whack* off a bicycle was not more surprised than I! Was it for this I had encountered the dangers of London, and off my own bat (with some slight assistance from a member of the police force) sold the "Book of the Bank of France?"

And now to come to grief in my own town and before my own people! What would they say at

school? What at Johnstone's? Oh, wait till Monday—just wait! And I ran over in my mind the list of boys who had promised to save up their pocket-money to come and give us a proper send-off. Moreover they ought to have been saving it up during the holidays—all the time I had been up in London.

Well, in the meantime there was nothing for it but to wait. Myn came back in about three-quarters of an hour, and mother went off immediately to give her wall-pans in the kitchen a comforting rub. They belonged to an aluminium set which my father had saved up and bought her as a birthday present. She had scolded him for at least six months on account of his extravagance. She had never put fire to one of them. They had hung on the wall ever since, but she had cherished them as the apple of her eye. So much so that whenever she was vexed or things (and sons) went contrary, she would instal herself by the big worm-eaten table, and with a set of sacred utensils, furnishings almost Levitical, she would give the whole shining batch a quite superfluous clean-up.

Nothing was ever seen so slow as that afternoon. No one came near us. We seemed to be boycotted. The red cross on the door in plague time could not have kept even gossipers away more effectively than the maligned brass plate. It was beginning to acquire an ironic signification, that inscription which we had been so proud of in the morning.

"MEE & MYN, LIMITED,
Stamp Experts."

"Limited," was certainly a good word, but at

present it represented too realistically the true state of our trade, to be really amusing. I could see Robb Junior's grimy penny lying very lonesome in the Receipts' tray, and both Myn and I wished that we had begun with something less pretentious than "Stamp Experts." But we had called the tune and now must face the music.

It was when the shades of evening were falling fast, that I got my first gleam of hope. Or rather —a reasonable explanation for at least part of our misfortunes.

Bitterest and most piercing of all my griefs was the fact that Jo Turner had forsaken me! Against him had my deepest vengeance been sworn. *Et tu, Turnus!* And I hesitated between flaying him alive and roasting before a slow, slow fire. Well, if you will believe it, about half-past seven in the evening, and when the white squares of the album and stamp-frames in the parlour window began to grin at us with blurred and ghastly glee, I saw Jo Turner. He had apparently forgotten all about me—all about the opening of the Stamp Exhibition—all about everything. He was going down the street hurrahing. Yes, actually—down our very street!

Such hardness of heart was almost inconceivable. In a moment I was after him. I grabbed him. My knee was in the small of his back. He sat down on the ground looking dazed for a while. Then I marched him across to the cottage.

"Where have you been?" I panted, for Jo was a solid chap, and it took some vim to fetch him.

"Why, where should I be?" he answered. "Course

I've been all the afternoon at Bailey's Circus over in Thorsby. And I've prigged another shilling out of father to go again in the evening. Quick, let me go! I can't stay, or I shall lose the ferry!"

In a moment I saw it. We had been so busy with our own affairs that we had actually opened on the one great Barnum-and-Bailey day. We were playing up against the Biggest Show on Earth! No wonder we had come to grief. Why, there would not be a boy in either of the two towns who could beg, borrow, or crawl under the tent, that would not be there all day. No wonder it was lonesome at the cottage with only a few stamps in the window.

It seemed almost incredible that we had not heard or noticed the posters. But our own business and advertising had been so overwhelmingly important that we had not really thought, seen, or listened to anything else.

All that we could do now was to march Jo to *our* Exhibition, and sell him a penny packet of German Confederation for his shilling. Once a day at Barnum-and-Bailey's is enough for any boy. We told him so.

And I forget where it was that Jo said he wished the North German Confederation. Not at Barnum-and-Bailey's, anyway!

CHAPTER XVII

AN APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE

We spent a pretty quiet Sunday, mother and I going to church in the forenoon. I think she was a little surprised that one so lost to the higher things as to turn her parlour into a stamp-shop, should yet retain at least the outward forms of religion.

The sermon was about the Prodigal Son, and whenever there was an allusion which mother thought pointed, she nudged me with her elbow. It was me and London she was meaning—no mistake about that, and the "husks that the swine did eat" (which the preacher explained as "packets of vegetable nourishment very nutritious to such animals, and of which they are very fond") were in mother's eyes our innocent packets of stamps in the old drug drawers. The only difference was that our swine, so far, would have none of them.

But, on the morrow, I, the Prodigal Son, would teach the East Dene piglings to despise offered mercies. I saw some of them at church, and instinctively they avoided my eye. There was Archie Payne and Willie Thorburn, the librarian's son. Both seemed to have something on their minds—perhaps too much Barnum and Bailey; or, it may be that, at sight of me, the solemn to-morrow surged

up suddenly menacing in front of them. Well, they had cause. They were twice guilty, for they had been intrusted with packets of leaflets to deliver, and I judged that these packets were in their pockets still.

There were other boys too, all suffering from the same inability to meet my eye. I marked carefully them for further dealing on Monday.

I did not see Myn till somewhat later. For though a Rad. and not believing much in churches himself, Old Phil was very stiff on his daughter doing the proper thing; but in the afternoon I was early at the garden seat—you know, in the corner where the brick came out. And then Myn and I had a pretty decent time picking the better stamps out of the cheap packets and making up more expensive sets out of them. I printed in capital letters on the top of each card and envelope, "We sell no Suez Canal or other forgeries." For at that time there was a great fuss about the short route to India, and lots of stamps came into the market that had never been nearer Suez than the Isle of Dogs.

The whole thing was rather quaint. I could not see Myn. Myn could not see me. But when we put down our heads both at the same time our eyes were not more than the thickness of a brick apart, which set us laughing—I don't know why. But we did not laugh long, for indeed there was much else to do—plans to talk over, new combinations to be thought out—one involving weekly payments for starting beginners with collections of a hundred or two. Of course, it was necessary in that case to

know your youngster, and consider whether you could enforce payment or not. I resolved to begin with my own classes in the High School. Over them the fear of Currycomb's cane within doors and my fists out-of-doors were of more effect than many decalogues. Cubs *are* like that, they have no moral sense; but to-morrow a lot of them were going to be put in the way of learning to have one. Sense means feeling, you know.

On the whole, it was a happy Sunday, in spite of our misfortunes of the day before. I never believed much in the rot about parents making Sunday fearful strict and fearful unhappy for their children. Why, with getting out in good weather and inventing games in bad, and the interest of seeing that the old folks don't catch you at it, almost any boy can make himself happy, if he is the right sort, that is. Girls are different. Some of them are even naturally good.

And with a brick out and Myn on the other side of the wall—well, it was pretty good. Old Phil came out with the *Red Review*, but he did not read much of it. He promenaded up and down the garden walks with his chin on his breast-pin, and that silly *Red Review* rolled like a piece of music behind his back. He stalked just like a stork, and every time, as he passed the middle walk, where he began to get us in focus, Myn said "*Cave*" and I slid the brick in. I need not really have done it half the time, for the old boy never looked. He simply went by without speaking or, at most, remarking that he hoped Millicent was enjoying her reading.

But I had been well brought up, and knew what was due to a situation. So when Myn said "*Cave*," I worked the brick like the inner door at a masons' lodge.

Millicent always answered her father that she was enjoying her reading very much, and—heave-ho! the brick was slipped out again before the wiff-waff of his coat tails was a yard away.

A very decent old bargee, Philip Hallamshire Sykes, and I don't care who knows it! Myn says so too, though she does not use that expression.

Monday was a day of tears. I had got up early, rubbed myself hard down—blowing like Ben Armstrong, the Paynes' groom, to help the effect. Then I went into Old Maid Easton's barn (the bulldog was not up yet) and swung our punching-bag to a rafter. Half an hour of that brought out the perspiration, and after another rub, I don't think I ever felt such a glow of affection for the teaching profession.

That is the best of being a pupil teacher. If you are a great real-for-true teacher with a diploma and a tail to your name, of course you can't go teaching the boys their duty in a friendly and fraternal manner in the playground. You have to wear a stiff collar, and, if possible, a double eye-glass. Think of a rough-and-tumble with a double eye-glass, six cubs on top of you as like as not.

But though a pupil teacher has not the power of pit-and-gallows inside the school, it depends entirely on his muscle in what respect he is held when he gets his scholars outside. I was all right for that. I may say that I was more respected than the mayor or the

chairman of the Dock Board in the playground of East Dene Academy.

Yes, it began with tears—vales and wails of tears—a tide of woe that spread from the youngest cubs with pocket-money to the very shores of the upper fifth. I would deal with the sixth later *and* individually. Old Currycomb, also, had a busy morning and thoroughly enjoyed himself. He took no other exercise, but having played golf in his youth he liked to keep up his swing. He never failed to keep his eye on the ball.

Altogether the Academy was a lively place that morning. Even the first and second assistants were stirred with emulation, and grew quite demonic on the score of discipline. Of course, after Barnum and Bailey, not a soul except girls (who don't count) had thought of looking at their "prep," so there was good and sufficient reason for all this. Also in any case it is good to teach youth the error of its ways.

As for me, I went about pointing out that if, as they ought, they had come to our Stamp Exhibition of Stamps, all this would not have happened. I suggested immediate reform. But it was a poor school that Monday morning. Barnum and Bailey had swept it with the besom of insolvency. However, I managed to impress upon even the most impenitent that they should represent their impoverished state to their mothers. Perhaps, even, get an advance on the following Saturday's pay, or take their father when he was in a good humour—a rather forlorn hope on Monday. Aunts, also, were fair game—especially the lonesome, affectionate kind, who always

had a little change in a drawer which they unlocked for "dear Tommy" or "darling Artie." For such I suggested a bouquet of the "Flowers that bloom in the Spring, tra-la," but advised that these should be carefully kept out of the sight of fathers when the request for an advance was made. Uncles were best of all—after dinner recommended, or when you saw one come out of a door (any door) wiping his mouth with a satisfied expression.

Oh, the good I tried to do in that school that morning is simply not to be told! Commercial Geography took a place all by itself in these young hearts. They saw the necessity for immediate action. For really Old Currycomb went, if anything, a little too far. Having been put on the scent, he denounced Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth in terms which were distinctly discourteous. What was worse—he enforced his moral applications with an energy for which I recommended arnica dabbed on cotton wool.

But a new spirit was abroad. The boys of the Academy saw the folly of spending their hard-earned (or hard-begged) shillings on circuses that fold their tents (like the Arabs) and clowns whose jokes they had heard the year before last.

From thenceforward stamps were to be their only joy. A few had some remainder money in their pockets. Perhaps a wise parent had prevented a second resort to the haunts of giddy pleasure. If so, then so much the better for them. These were told off to lead the way, forerunners of those who had to go athwart the town to "taffy" their mothers, respectfully approach their fathers (keeping a well-skinned

eye for the toe of his right boot), coax their maiden aunts, and catch their uncles just when that pleasant feeling of warmth had reached their . . . hearts.

But at the cottage during the hour of recess—ah, what a change was there, my countrymen! Mother, at once pleased and flustered, had to be carefully supervised, lest she should give away a sheet of Indian Native States in place of a sixpenny "mixed." Myn's eye attached that of the shy, small boy in the background. She invited him forward with a smile and suggested which packet would best meet his pocket's need. She welcomed the coming, and when he had no more money, she promptly sped the parting guest so that he might give place to the next in order.

I did not sell much myself, remaining mostly in the parlour with Archie Payne, Will Thorburn, and a few of the bigger boys—not even suggesting that they should buy, but rather taking them over the fascinating pages and explaining the marvels till you could almost *feel* their mouths water.

But though a few of them had stray shillings, I discouraged all investments for the present, telling them that they were merely the favoured forerunners of the "grown-ups" who were to have the privilege of first pick.

In spite of all, however, one or two Capes changed hands, and a bid was made for a set of early Canadas, of course wanting the "twelve." But I had no confidence in the ability of the offerer to pay. So I told him to bring on his cash and then we would talk.

All the same I could see very well that the tide was turned, and that our receipts would, in time, recover

from the blight thrown upon the town by the Greatest Show on Earth. I had to be up at the Academy to ring the bell, of course, and so had no time for more than a word with Myn.

"It's all right," I murmured, "they'll come!"

"Gracious!" she answered, equally low, "what have you done to them?"

"Brought them to a sense of their duty!" I said grimly. Then I added, "Now, Myn, don't let them stay. Put them to the door at the first *ting* of the bell. I don't want Old Currycomb to get on my neck for making them late!"

"All right," she said, "I'll shut the door in their faces, if I have to turn away money to do it."

And she did. Our customers were up at the school in time, better and poorer kids. There, after the storms of the morning, the afternoon announced itself calm. The doctor was somnolent. The assistants took things easy, and as for me, I went about dropping honey, and showing all and sundry how much better the state of the case was now than a few hours ago, when half the school was tingling.

Clowns spelt canes! Stamps brought the golden age—the land where it was always afternoon, as some poet fellow says. I cannot say that all called me blessed, but most had the sense to see on which side their bread was buttered.

I knew young Dr Coates who had recently come to East Dene. He sometimes bought a stamp off me. So I asked him all about eating sweets and the harm it did to girls' teeth and boys' digestions. He posted me up rippingly and lent me some gory-looking

diagrams designed to make the hair stand up on a bald man's pate. The next afternoon I gave all this to the lower forms, and I got so interested that I forgot all about being a pupil teacher, and waded in like a parson with a sermon he knows by heart.

And when I was nearly done with showing how much better it was to spend money rationally, I caught a waft of uneasiness crossing the class, and turning about, there at my elbow were Old Currycomb and Mr Raggles, the Chairman of the School Board of East Dene! Oh, what a mercy it was that I had not got out my next sentence! For I was just on the point of advising them all to come and save their teeth and their digestions by buying harmless and informative stamps instead of sickly, sticky candy and soul-destroying acid drops.

But I stopped in time—lucky for me.

The Chairman—he was a big banker and lawyer—clapped his hands.

"Well done," he said, "who is this young gentleman? One of your best assistants, I am sure! I declare I never heard anything better put in my life. I don't like sweetmeats myself—most pernicious, *I* call them." (He was over sixty!) "Young man, I congratulate you—you can look to me to propose an increase of salary at the next meeting of the Board! May I ask at which university you have studied?"

Now this was an awful score for Old Dr Curry. He went pink, and smiled all over. I declare I could see even his grey old wrinkly trousers bloom.

"No, Mr Raggles," he said, trying to control his voice, "this is our Academy pupil teacher, Sam Brown,

and the only university he has graduated at is that presided over by your unworthy servant!"

And the old Doc. bowed till you could see the whole of the bald spot on his crown (which we called the Desert of Gobi or Shamo). And may I never eat eggs and bacon again if that wasn't pink too. *Love's Rosy Petals* was not in it with the sunset tints on Old Currycomb that afternoon. The Board would never think of shunting him after that.

But he did the best he could for me too: said that he highly approved of the Chairman's proposal to increase my salary, and that he would support it with all his feeble influence—and so on and so forth.

Well, *I* had no objections, of course. Then the Chairman, Mr Raggles, went on to ask if this lesson, a part of which he had heard, was my regular work, and the Doctor said, "Well, not exactly—but once a week the pupil teachers were encouraged to give a practice lesson on a topic of their own choosing. Furthermore, he knew that I, Sam Brown, had given some attention to the important subject of Commercial Geography, but he had never before heard me give a lesson so eloquent and well-reasoned on the Use and Abuse of the Human Body!"

Neither had I, of course, and, as a matter of fact, they caught me just on the hop. A moment later and the cat would have been out of the bag—at any rate, the stamps would. But this was my lucky day, and everything seemed to fall out as well as they had fallen badly on Saturday.

Mr Raggles invited me to call and see him. He said that he remembered my father, and that he would

be glad to know how my mother was doing. Of course, I could not explain before all that class, whose ears were getting stiff and pointed forward with listening.

When I got home that night, I did not need more than the first glimpse of Myn's face over the heads of many small boys, all tucked in as for pick-a-back, over the sheets of stamps. Mother stood behind the counter proud and watchful.

I passed through and as I turned to go into the kitchen Myn whispered, "Sam, it's going to do! We have taken nearly six pounds to-day, and—there's a gentleman waiting to see you in the parlour."

I opened the door and there, turning over the albums at his leisure and making notes on a slip of paper, was—Mr Robert Fortune, my friend of the London train.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN IN THE PARLOUR

Now since ever I had met him in the railway carriage on the way from London, I had naturally heard a good deal, or at least asked a good deal about Mr Robert Fortune. It is not everyone who can afford to buy his nephews four pounds' worth of stamps at one go. Lucky kids! Uncles like that are scarce.

People who knew Thorsby said that Mr Fortune was a bachelor gentleman who did extraordinary things, had lots of money, but used it just as you would never for a moment expect. However, I did not pay any attention to that. I have noticed (as I daresay you have also) that people are always thundering ready to tell other people how they ought to spend their money. If Mr Robert Fortune wanted to put his money into stamps—why, I was not going to stand at the cottage door and *shoo* him away as if he were an intrusive chicken.

Anyway he was already in the parlour and I couldn't.

He was a dark, rather solemn, black-bearded man, not with the grand air of Old Phil, of course. But rather like a man who has made his own money and looks at the world through the eyes of long and

varied experience. Yet I did not quite like him, somehow. He seemed to know more about stamps than he let on. More about everything, in fact. But I had no objection to his money, and if he wanted to buy stamps off "Mee & Myn, Limited," at the marked figures—well, he could have them—in reason.

When I was younger I used to think that every person who smiled at me was the possible long-lost fairy god-parent, who should enable me to get through the world without working for my living—a horror to myself and a nuisance to everybody about me. I know better now. The world is run on better lines.

Smiles are cheap, and only one kind that I know of do any harm. These are, however, not smiles, only grimaces, and a neglected book called *The Proverbs of Solomon* will post you all about that—besides other things which will prove useful to a young man going into the world's business for keeps.

Anyway, Mr Robert Fortune rose and held out his hand. I don't think he smiled much. He never did anything very markedly. He waved his hand towards the stamp albums.

"Some good stuff, there!" he said, nodding his head. "Do you mind me going over them in your absence?"

"Certainly not," I said, "you have been our best customer so far!"

"Opened last week, I heard!"

I nodded. He seemed to know a lot about our place.

"Not much business on Saturday," he smiled this time, "'Here we are again, Joey' beat you out of the field! Didn't it?"

I answered that this was so—that it could not help being so. Boys being fools and girls girls, wise people who minded their business—which was stamps—had just to make the best of it.

He nodded, and continued to tick with his pencil.

"Goodness," thought I, "is he going to buy the shop? We may as well put up the shutters."

He was picking out one by one the best of my old collection—the plums, as it were, which I had stuck in to give the pudding flavour and appearance. He was doing it scientifically, so that I saw at once that he was no flounderer. Mr Robert Fortune was a collector, and had to be treated as such.

"I wish I had seen that 'Book of the Bank of France' which you sold," he said, "I would not have put you to the trouble of going up to London."

To this I did not answer anything, but continued to hand him sheet after sheet. He glanced at them quickly, his eye travelling from top to bottom as another man might have read a clearly printed book. He did not care in the least about the stamps I had got from London to sell. Quite systematically he went for the old ones which I had priced a bit high. But after half an hour I wished I had doubled the price in almost every case. He nailed all my old, ugly, squint-figured Brazils. He spent a long time over my early Isabelline Spaniards, of which I was rather proud. He ticked every single Oldenburg. And I declare the tears rose to my eyes, when I thought

that after he left the shop I might be a stamp-dealer indeed, but I would be quite destitute of any stamp collection worthy of the name.

Suddenly I cried out, "Oh, I can't really sell all those at once!"

Mr Robert Fortune looked up amused, as well he might.

"Why, are not these your own prices?" he asked, looking under his thick eyebrows at me.

"Well, yes," I said. "But——!"

"But what?"

"You know about stamps," I broke out, "it isn't fair. I meant these prices for the boys and people here. They would never buy such nice things. A three-coloured Heligoland is their idea of a stamp!"

Mr Fortune broke into a laugh, and patted me on the back.

"You really are unique," he said; "but there—I'll give you a quarter of an hour to alter the prices to what you consider just, and then I will reconsider my purchases. But you must not put on more than double in any case."

I knew that he was playing the cat and mouse business with me.

But I said, "Oh no, sir! I can't do that. I will stand by what I have put, and you shall have the stamps. After all you will appreciate them more than that—that—rabble of kids!"

"Well, yes," he said, settling down again to the sheets, "there is certainly something in that. I appreciate a good stamp, if that is what you are after!"

But it wasn't—no, not by a long way. It was to

have him get up and go, without bereaving me of my stamps, the face of each one of which I had known, as it seemed, from my childhood. Fancy you—a mother—selling your whole family at once into slavery. Would the money comfort you? No more it did me.

"Now we will count and regulate," he said, after he had passed the last sheet. He took out a big pocket-book with more divisions and flaps than I would have thought possible within one elastic band. He gave me one slip of paper out of this, and he kept another for himself.

"We will begin with the albums," he said; "please check the prices."

And as he detached the stamp, he lectured me on the proper way of fixing them temporarily so as to come away easy. Hinges one-quarter the size were far better, he said. And as he removed each, he called out the price, shoving the book over to me so that I could look, and we both marked the amount on the red-ruled paper. He swept through my albums like a tornado. The only decent thing he did was to say, "I won't spoil your window show of 'Capes.'" So he left the double page of big triangulars with the square of four in the middle of the right-hand leaf untouched. For the rest he was a regular blizzard, a whirlwind. He left every row gap-toothed. He bared whole pages. The first bandaged Isabellas looked like a deserted camp with the marks of where the tents had stood—worse than Barnum and Bailey's on Thorsby Common.

The tot was mounting up, but I did not care.

Neither apparently did he. Then came the sheets and in like manner he devastated them. I did not mind selling sixpenny packets to kids, but this was too much for me. I wondered how much I should get if I clouted him with the tongs. I did not want his old money. I wanted my stamps. I could sell "stuff" that came from London dealers with any man. But these early Saxons and Swiss Cantonals—they were, as the Good Book says (and, mind you, I am in earnest) bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

Myn, I knew, would rejoice. Myn has no sympathy with the sentiment of collecting. Cash returns are her motto. And I could see that there was a division of the pocket-book which was bulgy with bank-notes.

He went away, and Myn and my mother coming in, found me sobbing—just as my mother had done, regularly blubbering like a softy in his first term at school.

"What!" cried Myn, "has he stopped all that time and gone without buying?"

I waved my hand with a gesture of despair.

"Not without paying?" she said in an awed voice, and she was starting for a policeman. I pointed to a slim pile of notes under the paper weight. *I* had not the heart to count them, though I remember that Mr Fortune made me finger them. I could not see them for the tears.

"It's all over, Myn," I cried, "we may as well put up the shutters. He has ruined us!"

"What!" cried Myn, who knew how to count, "then the notes are bad! I'll soon see!" And

before I could stop her she was off like the wind. I don't know which way she went. She was a friend of Old Miss Easton's Bully and probably took the garden route. But anyway she was back in five minutes, waving the banknotes.

"Father says they are all right. He knows. Sixty-five pounds. Oh, Sam, why, we have paid all our exs.! We stand with our capital clear. It is too much—too much! Some misfortune will be sure to happen. It can't—it *can't* go on!"

And she in her turn burst into tears. Over the desolated albums we mingled the briny, till Myn, recovering herself, grew so rapturous that I could not for shame tell her what I had been crying for. I said I was glad.

"Glad—*Glad*—GLAD! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

The she-bear robbed of her cubs, the Numidian lioness ditto, the pelican of the wilderness that brings up its young by suckling them with its own blood in a kangaroo's pouch—think of these left cubless, childless, gorbless, and solaced with—sixty-five pounds!

No wonder that I laughed weirdly, so that mother came in and said that she thought I should take an infusion of camomile for it—and in the meanwhile gave me a liquorice cough lozenge.

That is the way women understand sentiment—when it relates to stamps. Well, to be really consistent a stamp-collector should take a vow of celibacy. I don't mean that he shouldn't marry. For that affects the getting of his dinner ready and the holes in his socks mended, particularly about the toes. But a sort of Spiritual Celibacy—a vow never to speak

to a woman about stamps—that's it. If you say a stamp is valuable, she always figures out how many becoming hats and gloves could be got for the price of it. Probably you lie about the price anyway—for that is the way of the collector. But that only makes them worse. Now, if you tell a man a big thumping value for one of your stamps, he doesn't immediately express it in terms of topper hats and ivory-handled "brollies." No, he makes a grab in his imagination and begins a yarn about a unique Sidney View with the broad arrow clearly marked on Government House, which he sold for a thousand pounds down on the nail, and cheap at the price. Then you understand one another, and all is peace.

But when women and stamps get together, you had better firmly compress your lips as you do when having your photo taken, and keep them so till the woman goes away. She won't stay long if left to herself.

Of course I don't mean Myn. She is quite different—besides being my business partner. But still, even she did not understand me why I cried.

I need not go into figures, which were never my strong point anyway. But I will only say that for the first week we turned over close on one hundred and nine pounds. And we wired off at once for more stuff and of a better quality. But that, when it arrived, did not change the appearance of my desolated albums, though, of course, I got some in as quick as possible to fill up the gaps. To the ordinary buyer they looked as good as ever, perhaps even fresher.

But not to my eye, nor indeed to that of anybody who really knew.

The necessity of replacing my dear lost treasures, about which I dared not speak to Myn, with something equally old and distinguished, wore me to a shadow. I could not see my way, and at nights I began to dream of great rafts of letters in which I waded waist-deep, and from which I cut out stamps and generous-sized postmarks till I had whole sackfuls. Then Mr Robert Fortune came into the room and said that they were all forgeries! I awoke screaming. It was the worst nightmare of my philatelic life.

I kept baiting Myn to try her luck again with Mr Greatorix Grandison and see if he would not let us have a turn at their old letters when the firm was still only the first builders of wooden sailing-ships on the Thor—indeed throughout all the North of England and East of Scotland—which is no small word.

But Myn said that her father would not hear of it. He said that there was no such thing about the works, which had been burnt down and built up too often to keep half a century of correspondence hid away in safes. It was as much as he could do to keep track of "the common task, the daily round. Ha, ha!" We must not expect everything, we young people. Let the "Book of the Bank of France" suffice us.

"But," I argued, "Mr Caleb Greatorix Grandison himself said that if we liked——"

"Well" (thus Myn shut me up), "father says he will permit nothing of the sort at the works. Mr Grandison knows nothing about it. There is no

correspondence there older than 1863 when they let the big Confederate privateer escape. Everything was taken away then and hidden—all that went before, that is. And Mr Hallamshire Sykes slapped his desk and added that not a letter in his office should be meddled for Mr Greatorix Grandison, nor all the 'stamp experts' in the world! So there!"

I said it worked out pretty mean, and if it had been anyone else than her father I should have made some remarks.

Then I looked at Myn's eyes. They were dancing. So I knew at once that she had a card up her sleeve.

"Table it!" I cried sharply. And the little (pretty big now, but no matter) beast went on smiling like a frog in a warm rain.

"Suppose," she said, and then stopped, still smiling.

"Go on," I shouted, "or I'll——"

"No threats, please, or you shan't hear a word!" I fell silent.

"Well," she said, after she had teased me long enough, "suppose that my father knows where the old letters were hidden. Suppose that old Greatorix Grandison is still willing to give us the run of them—would you mind a little journey of three or four or even five miles each way to have a look at them?"

"Of course I shouldn't, Myn," I cried, "what do you take me for?"

"For a lout who isn't half grateful enough for what a public-spirited and clever 'Co.' does for him, but goes and sulks and sulks *and* sulks—like a gir-r-rl!"

Then Myn said that *per*haps next Saturday we should go searching for hidden treasure, just like the people on Treasure Island, the rippingest book that ever was—and I asked her if she had got a chart with J. F. and a clove hitch on it.

But she only told me not to be silly. She didn't know anything about charts or "clove hitches," and didn't want to. She knew where the stamps were or, at least, her father did—which was more to the purpose. Myn had a poor taste in literature, though I had often tried to improve it. She liked *Misunderstood* and *Ministering Children*. She also read a periodical called *Dew Drops* on the sly. She was suspicious of all bound books. According to her, they were mostly dull. To have paper backs and be pretty ragged were the best passports to Myn's favour.

Well, I had occasion to go over to Thorsby to see if I couldn't rake out some of the boys who had promised to pay us a visit. Also I thought I would see if there was anything to be done with Artie or Artie's aunt — you remember the old lady who splattered about the tatting and oddments, out of the black bag coming from London. She had given me her address in Thorsby, and I was bound to look her up. Besides I still had the key of the bag.

I was strolling down the High Street, when something on the sunny side caught my eye. It was a new shop—double-fronted, all finely finished. There were velvet banks, and mahogany fittings everywhere. And on them—albums! My, I made one dash across the road nearly overturning an omnibus, and was before the window. There were several fellows there

staring in, with that mouth-pouting-suck-the-head-of-your-cane expression which people always put on in front of stamp shops. It was a boss establishment, all properly rigged out—with this department and the other department—"correspondence" and "local"—books about stamps, and all sort of dainty games—"How to stick in stamps!" "How to get a good collection for little money!" "How to specialise," "Stamps as an Investment!" I understood in a moment why we had had no custom from Thorsby.

And the name over the door in large gilt letters (I gasped here) was—

ROBERT FORTUNE & CO.
Branches in London, Paris, and New York.

CHAPTER XIX

CADMON'S COVE

I LOOKED through the doors—folding glass doors they were with ranges of stamps on them. I could not see Mr Fortune, but I saw nearly all my own stamps. They were duly marked—"Selected from the collections of the noted Stamp Experts, MEE & MYN, LTD." This sounded all right, but in every case the stamp was priced about four or five times what I had put on it—several at a score of times my figure.

Even as I looked in, I could see a tall, heather-mixtury gentleman bargaining for the square of New Brunswicks on which I set such store. It had the most lovely postmark, that hardly touched its vitals, as it were, yet said, "Fredericktown" in the plainest manner in the world. I could see Heather Mixture's face as he held it away from him, drew out his purse, and then shut the flap again, as if putting the thing out of his mind as too expensive. But I knew full well he would soon be back—just like the fellow who goes off mad, swearing he will never see his sweetheart again. But just as *he* comes back next night, so the man in the yellowish dead-bracken coat bought the squares of New Brunswicks and paid for them on the nail.

Then I wondered if, in a court of law, I would be justified in homiciding the fellow as he came out It was *my* stamp—you see that clearly. Surely the right of a parent in a child cannot be alienated by the mere passage of money. Then I wondered if he would give me the stamps if I told him all about it. However, I was too afraid of ridicule to speak. But I did venture to take off my hat and invite him across to East Dene to visit our collections.

"Who are you, sir?" said he, with a look which seem to infer that if I were not Bill Sykes in person, I was certainly a near relative.

However, I answered him quickly, presenting my card (our card) and informing him that I was the senior partner of the firm of Mee & Myn, Ltd., Stamp Experts, from whose collections the square of used New Brunswicks he had just bought had been selected by Mr Robert Fortune.

"Ha!" he said, with a lift of the eyebrows, "do you know Mr Robert Fortune?"

I said that I had that honour, also that up to the present he had been our best customer, but (here I paused to consider whether, even in my capacity of commercial traveller, I might venture) "perhaps after the gentleman, whose name I was yet ignorant of, visited our little exhibition, Mr Fortune might have to take a second place!"

Well, it worked all right, and he gave me his card, saying that he would be glad to have any lists or catalogues we might publish. I would give you a thousand guesses as to what was on

that card, and you never could get there unless I told you.

It ran thusways:—

The Rt. Hon. Sir MICHAEL HALLAMSHIRE SYKES,
Bart, K.C.B., etc., Late Governor,
Windward Islands.

Holy snakes—it was Myn's uncle, the pot of pots, the Sykes of Sykesdom—and no more side to him than Old Phil's week-day walking-stick. I had always fancied Sir Michael as a haughty knight clad in full armour, frowning over the bartizan, and crying: "Death to Old Brother Phil and all Red Rads.!"

But here were he and I talking together as close and comfortable as "Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot" on a Burns's dinner night.

And he didn't make fun either, as Mr Fortune would have done, slyly and covertly, but with a glint in the eyes that always told—and hurt. No, Sir Michael was like Old Phil himself, and treated me with the courtesy due to an equal—that is, after I had proved to his satisfaction that I was somebody, and had no designs on his watch-chain.

Partly I think that it was the joy of meeting a fellow stamp-collector, and that happens so seldom that (like staying at home from church) the pleasure never palls. People who know nothing about it sneer, and say that the proper bond between stamp-collectors is the big wall of the same lunatic asylum. But all the same there was a beautiful, kindly feeling between the poor pupil teacher, who, without much

real claim, had arrogated to himself the title of "Stamp Expert," and the Right Honourable Governor of the Windward Islands.

Sir Michael said that he would be in East Dene shortly. He had various arrangements to make there for a supply of surf boats, to be built by the firm of Grandison & Co. My, if he should happen to meet Old Phil, there would be times! I did hope that I would be there to see, and if I had dared, I should have asked him the day and date. But this, after all, was just a little beyond me. Myn might, perhaps, but not I. All my life bashfulness has been my bane.

Well, I hurried home as quick as I could, and told Myn all about the fine shop and Messrs Robert Fortune & Co.—with branches all over the world. Myn was so furious that I judged it better for the present to say nothing about her uncle. Very likely such a swell would never come at all, or if he did, he would go away with the idea that Myn was just my sister, who had swopped up all the good looks of the family.

At anyrate I must risk it. Yet I carried it in my mind that if Sir Michael or any other good customer came, I had really nothing but common "stuff" to offer him. So I set to work and got Myn to make the Saturday excursion absolutely certain.

She promised, and being her father's daughter, I knew that, bar contrariness and unforeseen tempers, Myn would toe the line. So I was just dropped-honey and treacle to her all the week.

Saturday came, and mother laid in a good store of provisions in the old bag that strapped crossways over

your chest. Father used to take it with him when he went on the night-shift. Mother was so interested in our adventure that she actually did not look at it sadly, or put it away, making us take our lunch in a handkerchief.

Myn arrived, brimming over with spirits and mockery. She would tell me nothing at first—neither where the treasure was, nor how to find it, nor what we might expect when we got to the enchanted castle.

"Follow your leader! That's me, Millicent Sykes!" was all she would deign me. And you can better believe that she looked just ripping when she said it. There now—I am at it again. Did you ever see anything so unexpressive as adjectives? You say "ripping" of a knife, of a book, of a stamp, of a girl (if nobody hears you except the girl). But not of a boy or a dog. You say a fine dog or a decent fellow. But that doesn't really express anything except that you *are* pleased with them. *I* may think your knife pot-metal, the stamp forged, the book rot, and the girl plain as a pikestaff. And so on. Yet a fellow can't write without adjectives. The publishers say the pages look so bald. However *I* try as much as I can. Of course in describing stamps you must use them—"a deep lilac-blue Napoleon III., 20 c., date 1863, uncut and unlaureated."—That's the right use of description. You can't mistake that for anything else. It is final, like mathematics or capital punishment. But try it on a girl—on Myn for instance: "Girl of 1863 crop, 5 ft. 4 in."—that's about all. After that you get stuck

about the colour of her hair, which is different according to the lights, and her eyes which never look twice the same. Then her complexion and her dress—why, a fellow would never be done! I cannot help regarding with admiration the way these Green-Book fellows knock off a girl in ten or twenty lines, and then forget what they have written, and make her turn up at page 290 with eyes of a quite different colour. The other changes—hair, complexion, shape of nose, might all happen to the heroine if, like me, she reads when she can the Beauty "ads." on the back page of the *Queen*.

But I have wandered on paper. And it was much pleasanter to wander that morning over the big moorlands that stretched away towards the Eastern Sea.

There were ranges of low hills immediately behind East Dene, as I have said, from which, as you mounted higher, you could watch the steamers and all the fine breezy things paddling about no bigger than chips—tall-masted ships laden with pine logs from Norway, pulled here and hauled there by little fussy tugs, that as soon as they were loose, went ploughing down-tide, half-burying themselves in their own furrows. Then when you got outside the headlands you saw the coast very high and cliffy stretching away into the North.

All the time I was dead keen for Myn to tell me where she was going. But the wretch liked to tease, and I had perforce to be content. Well, it was a fine day—just the appropriate kind of day for a September holiday—"September serene" as the

hymn says. It was serene and no mistake, and for once that was an adjective well placed, though I have seen the corn-stooks flying in September too. But the hymn-man meant to strike the average, and you better believe he struck it. "September serene" was beneath our feet. It spread to the horizon, stretched over the sea, and went vaulting up to the roof-trees of the big blue sky-house. My, wasn't I glad I wasn't dead! Myn too, though, to discourage sentiment, she said that what she cared about was whether we should find any decent stamps. It seemed a long way, and we went on mounting higher and higher up the long shoreward pent of the cliffs. Presently there came a break. We could see the cleft from far away, because the sides of it were all feathered with trees, of which we could see only the tops, misty and fluffy—no, that's not the word—like worn feather dusters, I mean.

Then quite off her own bat Myn began to tell me. It was to Cadmon's Cove we were going. I had heard the name before. There were good nut-woods there, but difficult—because of gamekeepers and people who wanted to shoot birds about the time the nuts were ripe. This was particularly idiotic of them, for had they not the whole year in which to shoot their silly birds, while there is only a week or two when it is the least use going after hazel nuts. I mentioned the keepers to Myn, but she drew a sealed letter from her pocket, and said, "I don't care a straw for all the keepers in the country—I am going to call upon the lady of the house!"

"Who may *she* be when she is at home?" I asked.

"She is always at home," Myn answered. "She is Mrs Percival Egerton Greatorix!"

"All that," I said, meaning to be funny.

"Don't mock," said Myn, frowning and nodding her head, "rather approach with trembling. For if 'All that' does not happen to take to us—not a stamp will you get a smell of!"

"She has stamps?"

Myn looked at me loftily, sniffing upon the tip-tilted nose of contempt, and thus making herself more like her father when interrupted at his work than I could have believed.

"D'you suppose I brought you up here, and left your mother in charge on a Saturday, just to let you look at the view?"

Myn was sudden death on landscape. She liked better to heft the till in her hand after a good day—also going down to the bank to deposit, for now we had an account in our joint names.

So after a while she told me that Mrs Percival Greatorix was a sister-in-law of old Caleb's, and that though the Thorsby ship-builders had been just honest ship folk and sea-going captains, on the Greatorix side the family was about as top-lofty and bucked-up about themselves as the Sykeses, which was saying a great deal—all except Myn, of course, and (so far as I could see) her Uncle Michael.

Well, at the time when Myn was getting ready to be born, and when I was trying for the muddiest places to crawl into, the Grandison ship-builders had a crisis—oh, not financial—they were far too well caulked for that. But political—full-grown swell

politics too. You see, they had built a cruiser and got her started off to make war on the Confederate side of the big American war. I know all about that. It was started by Uncle Tom and a man named Lloyd Garrison Dred, who was Senator for the Dismal Swamp. He was arrested for singing "John Brown's Body" in the streets of Harper's Ferry, or Harper's Weekly—I am not sure which. Anyway, there was an awful row, and this man, Senator Uncle Tom Dred Scott, sent across Messrs Sliddell & Mason to smooth things over. And as ill-luck would have it, they were captured by this very privateer from Grandison's yard at Thorsby and made to walk the plank, having first signed a paper promising to say nothing about it. Which they didn't, having to attend a funeral. But it got out somehow. You can't keep things like that out of history books. And after that there was the biggest kind of a row, and all the Grandison papers were brought to Old Mrs Egerton's for safety. And that's where they were now.

At least so Myn told me, and she had all American history right at her finger ends. She learned me, and I have put it all down here word for word to be handy for reference.

The house was a big one with stables and garden-houses set a bit back. There were lots of fine walks, not all done up fresh and fresh every morning, but with the leaves left to blow about a bit and look natural—the way they should be.

Myn and I went down to a gate where there was

a lodge, and a man with leggings came out and asked where we were going.

So Myn put on all the Hallamshire manner and said that we were calling upon Mrs Egerton Greatorix. And the man in leggings asked what was our business with that lady.

Myn told him that was our business, not his, which made him pretty waxy, as you may imagine. In fact he was for not letting us in or opening the gate. But he changed his tune very suddenlike at the sight of the bit of pasteboard on which Old Caleb Grandison had written a few words to Lady Egerton.

We soon found that all the countryside called her Lady Egerton. Of course she wasn't—no more than you or me. But then she belonged to a fearfully old family and looked like it. Not that she was haughty—oh no, as you will soon hear.

For we hadn't gone very far along when we came upon a little old lady standing at the corner of a side-path. She was listening to a bird singing up in the trees unseen. She turned her head and looked at us with a warning motion of the finger that signalled "please do be quiet." So of course we were. Then she listened again. She was a good bit like a bird herself, all in brown and black, with quick round eyes set wide apart. She had a little stick which she was now holding up in the air, as if personally conducting the mavis through the twirls of its song. And when the bird had finished she came trotting up to us with her stick tap-tapping on the hard avenue, and said, "Wasn't it nice, children? They don't often sing like that at this time of year. Perhaps it is the

season, or maybe the popping of the guns in the woods up yonder where my nephews will go shooting my game. I wish they wouldn't, but of course they are right to amuse themselves. But where are you going, children ?"

"To call upon Mrs Egerton Greatorix," said Myn politely. "We have a letter and card from Mr Caleb Grandison for her—to introduce us, I mean."

"Well, the bird did that—but never mind, give them to me—I am Caleb's aunt. Poor Caleb, always at his moneymaking, and no more care for birds than to eat some of the bigger ones with bread crumbs. What does he say ? Dear, dear, I have gone and forgotten my glasses again. Read me what he says, child. But first tell me who you are. Sykes—Hallamshire Sykes—dear, dear ! Dear, dear ! I used to know a man of that name—Philip ! He was your father ! He was your father ! Dear, dear ! And Michael is your uncle. It makes me—well, well, you can't tell how things will turn out. So they quarrelled. Well, they did always that. Philip was quick and Michael was slow. It was Phil's fault, always. Eh, dear, childie, and you are Phil Hallamshire's daughter—we used to call him that. And who is this young gentleman ?"

"My business partner, Sam Brown," said Myn. "We have started a place in East Dene to sell old stamps. Father lets us."

"Dearie me—Phil all over again !" She laughed as at a recollection. "And what is it you want with me ? You shall have all I can give you. The letters—the old letters of the firm ! For anything I

know they are in the garret of the big barn yonder. They have not been touched since '63. What good can they be to anyone? But since Caleb says so, and you want them—why, you shall have the key and welcome. But I warrant there are many waggon loads. You will never be able to take them away."

The two of us almost danced for joy. Then Myn explained it was not the letters themselves we wanted to take, but only to get off the stamps without hurting the letters.

And the old lady said, "Eh, dear! I am sure you are very welcome! But not a step do you go up into that dusty, fusty old place until you have had some dinner with me. You must excuse an old woman, my dear, for want of ceremony. But I dine in the middle of the day, and you must just put up with what Janet can get ready for you. You shall see the next time I shall do better. You shall come by invitation and we must have something nice prepared for you. Also I shall get Thomas Baker to look you out some overalls to keep the dust off. It must be inches thick up there."

And so, hope singing in our ears, we followed the mistress of Cadmon's Cove in to dinner. But in spite of Janet's good things the hope of the bales in the barn choked us like the baked meats of a marriage breakfast.

CHAPTER XX

THE TROVING OF THE TREASURE

The barn was a big gaunt building, solid like a fortress. The underpart evidently continued to be used, for even now the door stood open invitingly enough. There were recent traces of corn sheaves having been dragged across its floor of hard-beaten earth. The butt ends of autumnal "stooks" stood out in a double prickly wall, and quite a little barnyard of speckled fowls, guarded and bossed by a foreman cock, scratched and picked about the entrance, venturing within only to come out again with a startled whoop and in a scramble of fluffed feathers.

But it was not there that the letters were to be found.

Round at the back there was an orchard into which Mrs Egerton Greatorix guided us. She had a bundle of keys in her hand, and her cheeks were flushed. At lunch we had told her all about ourselves, and she had seemed interested with that kind of sweet, anxious, impersonal interest that comes only to dainty tea-cuppy old ladies. (There I go again scattering adjectives like a Green Book man or—a pupil-teacher!)

"I often sit here," she murmured, glancing about

the orchard lovingly, "it is so pleasant to watch the sun on the sea."

And as a matter of fact it was. On this side of Cadmon's Cove you seemed to breathe lighter and saltier, and I could see that in a few weeks the apples and pears would be prime. Even now I should not have minded a go at the damson plums. They were regularly weighing down the trees. But of course what really attracted our eyes was the big outside staircase with its twisted iron rail, all rusty with the sea air. For the big door had not been opened since the cruiser-privateer sailed away and all the correspondence of the Greatorix Grandison firm came out here to abide in safety among the blowing orchards and above the rumble and tumble of the German Ocean thundering into Cadmon's Cove. I could hear it now, and it made me feel—well, I don't really know whether it was like a poet or only all of a tremble to get elbow-deep among those piles of stamps.

Probably a mixture of both. We mounted to the second storey of the barn. It was a kind of granary with a huge padlocked door, and another from which in old times bags of grain had no doubt ascended and descended by rope and pulley.

On the first there was a big, a whacking big padlock, and the key was stiff as Old Currycomb's upper-lip when he affirms that he will "flog the school!" I had to run into the house and ask for some oil. The old lady said sweet oil, but I took the liberty or asking for a little paraffin also. By and by I got the thing open, but not before it began to strike me that

perhaps a file would be the most direct road into that barn.

Then after that there was a lock to the door itself. But that went easily without any sort of oil, and a queer, musky, mousy smell met us in the face.

The old lady lifted her skirts with the same quick decided birdlike gesture, flirted them a little like a Jenny Wren does its tail, and stepped inside. The whole big space of the granary was empty, except at one end where a great number of oblong packages were wrapped in cardboard and covered with sheeting. Dust—well *rather!* Hay-dust, corn-dust, meal-dust, common dust—all sorts of dust, except gold dust.

"Now I will leave you," said Mrs Egerton Greatorix, "you won't want me, and I couldn't help you. Just let Mr Sam Brown come in if he needs anything—or if *you* do, my dear. You had better unbar the big door at the far end. That will light you at your work."

This I did. It was only held in place by two immense bars of wood, evidently the work of some country carpenter who, having been pressed for time, had roughed them out with an axe. But they slid back easily enough, and though the hinges creaked and squealed, the splendid white-blue light off the sea flooded in, and you could have seen the engraver's name on a French Jock-and-Jenny stamp—the one with the two figures that look like an M, I mean.

I forget whether or not we said a temporary good-bye to the dear old lady. I don't think I did. I hope better things of Myn, but I am noways certain. I was rushing at the big "row" of letter packets before

her shadow was off the threshold. But Myn stopped me.

"Look here, Sam Brown," she said, "this thing has been entrusted to me. I stand pledged to my father that the correspondence shall not be interfered with. He stands good for the same to old Caleb Grandison. He is all right, my father, but he would throw me overboard like so much bad cargo if it were a matter of the firm. So, Mr Samuel Brown, let this thing be run as it ought—as if our office had been brought out here and we were doing our accounts. You can tackle the dirty work, but do it neatly. I will classify and put away the proceeds."

"If we find anything," I said gloomily, "perhaps somebody has been here before us!"

Myn, who as usual had taken command, waved her hand towards the heaps with a gesture that meant, "Better go, look, see—and anyway, don't stand jawing there!"

I was going at the packages with my knife, but Myn she said no.

"See here, Sam," she called out, "father trusted me with the seal of the firm. It was he who sealed all these in 1863, or whenever it was. And we are to undo only one package at a time. We are to read nothing that we can help, or cut anything with writing on the other side, and above all to re-tie and re-seal everything as it was again."

I began to see that there was going to be no wading waist-deep among "Sydney Views," or trampling of the winepress among queer wispy Turks and Japanese of the early square issue. Yummy-yummy—that

would have been nice! But Myn was ever so starchy and all bucked up with her father's notions as to what was the correct card in an office. As if there *could* be an office in a barn!

All the same I felt light-headed. I should have liked to hack the parcels open, to dance among them, to catch up a rarity here and another there, doing everything to the brisk tune which came up to us with the clapper of the sea against the rocks beneath. But Myn would have none of this.

"One bundle at a time, *if* you please. Consider yourself in Caleb Grandison's front office and handling his property. I am responsible. Now forward march."

It was tough at first, but after a while I got the hang of it, because each time I got out of hand, Myn told me of it. And all the while, so long as I held my tongue, the discoveries came tumbling in. Oh, was there ever such a day in the memory of man? I think not. Not in mine at all events.

The unsealing of the very first packet yielded a little square of Black V.R.'s! They had been sent on to the firm from London, or to Caleb himself more likely, just to show him, some time in 1840, what things were coming to. For he had written in his own stiff quill-pen hand on the margin, inside the red line to which they were fixed with a pin—

"*Query? What in the world are these? Fly-papers?*"

He didn't know, and apparently never knew, nor, as far as I was concerned would he ever be informed. But I did. And no sooner had I grabbed what must

have been one of the first blocks of four V.R. Black 1840 ever seen, than I kneeled down and knocked my head on the floor of the granary three times. I was willing to do it oftener, but Myn asked me what I was up to, and if I had gone suddenly mad. She didn't think much of squares of four then—nobody did. But I saw that some day people would. So I hung on to those stamps, and rapped my head once again on the boards. Then I explained that I was doing "kowtow" to the spirits of my ancestors for the good luck. This she said was very wicked, and told me to go on digging.

Further down there were lots of early British—wads and acres of them, blue and black—some blue pairs hardly postmarked at all—one of those worn plates that they call now the ivory head, and any amount of the dearer ones with a lot of sides. Altogether we had done pretty well, but, except the V.R., had come on nothing outstanding. There were, however, several Mulready envelopes, not of any great real value, because Caleb had scrawled disobliging remarks across the picture:—

"What the insalubrious purgatory is this?"

"Keep your picture puzzles at home! I can't find the Duke of Wellington!"

Also other things that it would not further the cause of stamp-collecting to repeat. Right at the bottom there was one blue Mulready which was very pretty, not worn or faded like most of them.

We opened the next, and—lo, it was all foreign correspondence! Yes, my dear sainted aunty, it was filled with colonies—a black Canada Twelve Pence

used, a square of four vermilion One Franc French that had been all the way to Venezuela, and had been sent back to Grandison's to explain some privateering transaction. Probably that was all Caleb ever saw of his money from the Venezuelan, for underneath was written "He is a liar! Write off!"

Myn told me that it meant "Write it off as a bad debt!" She seemed to consider this something awful. Myn was always dead nuts on settling accounts at once—I not so keen. The fellow always lets you know when he wants his cash. But Myn used to lie awake in the night if she owed the chimney-sweep three-pence. There was no peace till it was light enough to go down and pay the debt.

It must have been a bad conscience or something on Myn's part. Jolly glad I never was troubled that way! Of course I always paid when I had to, as a man ought. But to give another chap the use of your money for weeks and months when there was no need for such haste—why, it is contrary to the first principles of banking!

Or if it isn't, it ought to be.

Well, the Canada black and a whole colony or "Beavers," all uncut in pairs and squares, and—oh, all the tribe of the smaller colonies, they nearly made me faint. Myn sent me down so often for hot water that I am sure it was a bother, though they didn't say anything. So I resolved to bring a little spirits-of-wine furnace with a pannikin for boiling next time, and then Myn could steam and soak all she wanted. Of course, we could take empty envelopes entire, but most of the best were on the letters themselves. And

it was a great joy to find one that could be cut—that is to say only those with blank sheets behind them.

Well, we forgot all about tea-time, and had to be sent for. But Myn sent back a very pretty message, asking Mrs Egerton Greatorix to excuse us. We were really too dirty, but we would pay our respects to her after having visited the pump, and thank her for all her kindness then.

The maid smiled and in a little while a man came out with a tray filled from end to end with good things—dropped scones, little round "bannocks," sandwiches, besides fruit and honey, with a plate and knife for each of us.

This man was not surly like the man at the lodge. I could see, however, that he was dying to laugh, though he had too great a respect for his own cloth and feelings, not for ours, to do it. Indeed I don't blame him. For the overalls were his, and Myn with her head tied up in a towel, all her skirts bunged into the leg-things, and her little feet peeping out, well, she looked funny enough to disturb the gravity of a meteorologist making "scarts" and arrows over all the seas in the world. Anything more solemn than that you never saw. A grave-digger is not in it with a weather-chart man. That is because he knows it is four to one that it will turn out wrong, so he wants to carry it off with a face as long as to-day and to-morrow.

But we waded into that tea thankfully enough, and it was good of the old lady. The serving-man unbent a little, but still had to run down into the garden sometimes to smile. I myself heard him smiling three

or four times behind the laurels. Then he took the things away and we went at it again. I am not going to weary you by telling all that we found. It would give everybody in these days their deaths from sheer green envy. They would chuck this valuable history about, and accuse me of extending the facts. Whereas, on the contrary, I have been most careful to keep well within the mark. Grandison's appeared to have done business with the greater part of the world, and we got stamps which were pretty common then, but have got rare since, like sugar, by the bagful. Of course, it did not come to so much money-value as it looks now. For prices ruled very low in these days, unless you found a man who wanted just the very thing you had—something that nobody but you had. But, as you may imagine, that was a coincidence which did not happen every day.

When we struck work that night we had gone over about one-third of the packages, and Myn had my satchel nearly full of stamps and envelopes, mostly good, or capable of becoming so. But the Twelve Pence Canada and the dazzling square of V.R.'s were the trump cards. So in one sense it was a black day.

We cleaned up at the pump, and made ourselves as respectable as possible. Myn even combed my hair with the pocket instrument of torture which she carried for my behoof. Her own went all right with a little water, a twiggle of her fingers, and squashing her hat on the top. This was manifestly unfair.

The old lady was pleased because we were pleased. But she betrayed no interest in our finds. We told her that all had been put up, and sealed as we had

found it. And she said that was right. She had been trying all her life to be tidy, but had never quite succeeded. Her maid scolded her for it every day. This was that Janet who had only been with her thirty-five years.

Mrs Greatorix walked right down to the lodge with us, taking Myn's arm, and asking her questions about her father. There she introduced Myn to the keeper's wife and baby, and drawing me apart asked if I knew Mr Philip Hallamshire Sykes, and anything about the lady he had married.

I said that I knew Mr Sykes, but as for Myn's mother, that was long before my day, and I knew nothing at all. At which she sighed, and calling Myn out, kissed her (to the young lady's great astonishment) and made the gamekeeper go part of the way with us towards the town.

"Your father would not like you to be out so late, Millicent!" she explained. And she herself walked off into the dusk of the coppices with the gamekeeper's wife and baby, who in their turn were to convoy her home. We promised to send her word when we were coming again—for the sake of Janet. Janet was always so cross when people came unexpectedly.

"Not that I can always help it, my dears, as you see!" she said, pathetically.

We did not need the keeper, and though he had put aside his surliness, he had no real pressing use for us. So as soon as we got within sight of the lighted streets of East Dene, and the thousand sparklets that marked the quays and docks crowding on both

banks of the Thor estuary, he abandoned us to our fate.

We were very glad, for we were dying for a talk. And Myn once more astonished me by saying that she had found a little bundle of private papers of her father's which she had taken the liberty of annexing. She meant to give them to old Phil that night, and if he said she had done wrong in sneaking them, she would put them back. But she thought it was most probably a mistake, and that he would be very grateful. I had my doubts.

She had had a look at one or two, however, and was not quite so innocent as she made out.

For on going into the library, there sat old Phil Hallamshire, with some papers before him, and his gold-rimmed eyeglasses astride his patent Sykesian nose. Myn kissed him. He looked up and nodded to me, apparently still with his mind on what he had been doing.

But the next minute Myn brought him up all standing, hitched him out of his day-dream like a half-pound trout on a salmon rod.

For without volunteering any news of our trip, or making any explanation of our arrival in the September dusk, she plumped out the question, "Why am I called Millicent?"

You never saw anything like it—the change in old Phil's face, I mean. All the Hallamshire "side" went out of it, also all the "faithful and trusted servant of C. Grandison & Co." He grew paler, and sat staring at his daughter, who had her chin on her hands, and was looking at him as fixedly.

"Why, after an old friend of mine!" he answered. But you could catch the stammer in his voice.

"Ah," said Myn, quickly, "any friend of that name?"

And she tossed the packet of correspondence she had sneaked out of the barn across to him. I could see the outside address, for the reading lamp with which he had been working shone strongly upon the yellowed envelope.

The top letter was addressed in old Phil's own hand to "Miss Millicent Egerton, Scrope Tatton Hall, Yorks."

The expression on old Phil's face when he handled these letters first showed me that there was, after all, something greater and stronger in the world than stamp-collecting.

CHAPTER XXI

THE HATCHING OF A CONSPIRACY

MYN told me afterwards that her father never went to bed at all that night. He sat up with that packet of letters. Wouldn't have expected it of Old Phil, would you? But you can't ever really tell till a thing is tried how it will turn out, and the sooner you get that fact branded on your mind (like the old convicts were on their collar-bones) the easier you will get through the world.

I had the stamps, and oh, what a time I had! Intermittent but scrumptious. I lit my candle ten times, and put it out again every time I thought I heard mother stirring. I gloated over them, but like Myn mother was without sympathy, except for the cash the stamps brought in. Finally I heard her turn out, creak the floor, and come right to my bedroom door in her list slippers. So I was sure that it must be the light under the door and through the key-hole that was putting her on the track. To stop that I threw down my breeches and coat on the floor and filled up the key-hole with chewed paper. Then mother went to sleep. I felt that it was wrong to keep her awake and anxious about me all the night.

I have always been like that. I like mother to have as little trouble about me as possible. Then I

continued my gloat and wished that I had been Tennyson, or Gilbert and Sullivan, or one of these clever fellows who do librettos and "selections," so that I could have sung appropriately the beauty of the Canada Twelve. I did not then believe I could ever bring myself to sell it. It's awful being a tender-hearted stamp-dealer! That's why I am the only one that ever was. The rest were all born pachydermatous, within and without, and sucked the stamps of their nurse's love letters, saying that it was the cat.

But as for me—it is this very tender-heartedness that I have suffered from all my life. It has kept me from the acquisition of wealth, besides exposing me to frequent and unmerited reproach.

Ah, well, I believe the only person who really slept well that night was Myn, who had raised all the dust. But that, I have found out since, is almost normal. The criminal is always awakened from a profound slumber, whilst the poor carpenters and executioners have all the worry of work and of sleeplessness in the long, long night watches. So Myn slept like an average healthy murderer with a good conscience. The rest of us like the other chaps.

So there was Old Phil with his letters—the nice old lady out at Cadmon's Cove thinking of the information she had got about the Hallamshire Sykeses, me with my bundle of stamps which I did not want to part with, and my good mother fearing that the responsibilities of business were getting too much for me, in addition to the cares of peppering knowledge into old Currycomb's cubs.

The next morning Myn, after sleeping all night without turning, began to remember what her father had received the evening before. She was at that time gulping a story in *Dew Drops* called "The Secret of Her Birth." And the little donkey actually thought (for she took her sentiment in another and more fatal form) that her father would draw her mysteriously apart, put his finger to his lip, and reveal the tale of how he had loved and lost. Then scorning expense, they would take a cab out to Cadmon's Cove, and fall weeping into the arms of Mrs Egerton Greatorix crying, "Mother, mother!"

Not that in any case the little wretch would have stayed there long. Catch her! She would have been out to the barn after the rest of the stamps. Myn never had much time to waste on the purely domestic affections.

But of course Old Phil did and said nothing of the kind, as I could have told her, if she had done me the honour to consult me. He strolled down to his office, and I'll wager that the packet of letters were not left behind at home in the safe. If they were—well, I can only say that I am disappointed in Old Phil.

It was Sunday, of course, because that day comes after Saturday, and lies like a perilous delight on the confines of Monday—besides being a day when you mustn't be seen doing various things. So Old Phil generally went to his office, where he was believed to pass the morning alone with the *Red Review*, a nice fire in the grate, made by the office keeper, Abram Cheynie, and his (that is, Old Phil's) boots cocked up

on the mantelpiece. But this, however, has never been proven, and Abram Cheynie denies it point blank.

Well, as a great favour, and because we had been so good during the week (also because she herself wanted an afternoon snooze) mother let us, that is, Myn and me, go out a walk. This was not her custom, as a general rule, but seeing that we could get out on the common and away without anyone seeing us, she thought there would be no harm, especially as each of us had been once to church that day already—and so, as it were, had paid our footing.

At anyrate this Sunday afternoon we got clean away, and so soon as we had passed the interlaced lovering couples with their heads dropping inward—so silly—we stretched it as hard as we could for Cadmon's Cove. It was a long way, and especially when we did not think that we could muster the face to go in and demand the keys from the lady of the manor.

But we thought it just possible that we might meet John Baker, the humorous serving-man, who could hardly keep from grinning at the mere sight of us—Heaven alone knows why—I don't. And he, if in a good mood, as he ought to be on the Sabbath, might possibly fetch us the keys. Of course we might not see him, or he might prove faithful in the wrong spot. But at anyrate we would see the big white-washed barn that held the bales of hidden beauties.

There was once a great writer and a good man who wrote about all things that are wild and natural, flowers and birds and beasts. His name was Richard

Jefferies. People have rather begun to forget about him now, but his essays are worth bales of the things they sell now for natural history books. And a man that knew him told me that when he was ill, and could not afford to buy expensive books, he used to walk every evening to within sight of a certain mansion, and pointing to the wing that held the library he would say gently and regretfully, "There is the place where there is a copy of the first edition of *Sowerby's Botany!* Now let us go home!"

Perhaps the man lied, but somehow I have always felt that that was a fearfully nice story. It is true about stamps anyway—I don't know about Sowerby.

Well, we resolved to try our luck, and I can tell you we pegged it. Myn could walk, you may take your solemn davy. Of course, I had the longer legs, and Myn had to take little trots about every ten or fifteen yards to keep up. It must have been a rum spectacle, neither of us looking at the other but going right on, looking straight before us, with our noses sniffing out the direction of Cadmon's Cove.

Well, we got there all right, but the natural bashfulness of our dispositions prevented us from disturbing the surly gatekeeper on the Day of Rest. Instead, we got through a hedge, crossed a kind of marsh, and after climbing a wall of rough, north-country stone, we found ourselves on the avenue quite near the house.

We could see behind the gable of the barn and the tops of the trees of the orchard.

We reconnoitred. We did not care to meet the old lady with the stick who conducted bird concerts.

John Baker was our mark, or one of the younger lady domestics. But it was not our lucky day.

Apparently they were all asleep, or reading the works of Flavius Josephus translated by Whiston, which it was their bounden duty to do. We knew in our hearts that we ought to have been doing the same. But we were far from home and—

Jiminy Christmas—there was Old Phil Hallamshire coming straight down the avenue towards us! Why, we would as soon have thought of seeing the—Michael, the archangel, I mean. But there was no time to skip into the bushes. Or at least it was not safe. For Old Phil, like many other grown-ups who are beginning to get grey on top—saw a jolly sight more than you gave him credit for.

So we had to brazen it out. We stood planted, Myn and I. We might with a little watering have taken root. We gaped—at least I did, expecting instant execution—nothing less.

But Old Phil passed us, nodding pleasantly, as he would to a couple of his best clerks whom he had caught in church time communing with Dr Greenfield.

"Fine day for a walk," he said pleasantly, "don't let me keep you."

And he went his way, walking springily, and alert as if he had suddenly grown younger by twenty years.

"I say," I whispered to Myn, "do you suppose he recognised us?"

Myn was pondering, her finger on her lip, the whole barnful of stamps momentarily forgotten.

"Father, dear," she murmured, as she gazed after

his retreating form, "I respect you no end—I reverence—I admire. But there is something under all this that your loving daughter is going to find out."

Then I knew that Philip Hallamshire's chances of keeping his secret, whatever it was, were few and evil. I had often tried to keep things from Myn myself—innocent, simple things as it seemed to me (about Jenny Sands for instance), but she always found me out. And then they loomed up suddenly as big as houses and as black as the pit. Old Phil had better be careful, whatever his little game might be.

We went home rather sorrowful in Old Phil's wake. At least I was sad because there were no stamps that day. Myn was thinking, and told me to "Shut up!" with quite masculine inelegance as often as I tried to talk.

"Let me alone," she said, "I must think."

Well, I could think too, but I did not make such a fuss about it as Myn did. I refrained from telling her this though. I have always tried to be considerate to those younger than myself.

We walked home in silence, and right against the sunset I saw all the possible stamps in those unopened packets—the scores and scores of bundles set up against the wall. I seemed to see the beautiful old ivory paper and the lightly post-marked stamps in the corner. I never remember anything more beautiful than that sunset, with the sun sinking into a complete series of Red Penny Plate Numbers, such as never existed in any collection, while the sky shone lilac and delicate like sheets of Dominicans, with clouds

floating above rosy like the first British thrippennies! Yah, say I can't describe—beats the Green Books all to shivers when *I* try.

Well, Myn didn't care a toss-up. She walked home like the ghost in Macbeth, when the fellow inside the sheet thinks that he is having his one chance in life. I have known Myn pleasanter company. She was as growly as the average stockbroker on settling-day.

Then all at once she asked me how old I was, and I said, "Getting on for twenty!" And she asked, "Did I think I could stick to that?" And I answered, "What would be the use of being a stamp-dealer if I stuck at anything, or of having a Scotch mother if I couldn't stick *to* anything that came my way?"

Then Myn thought some more, and when we got to the corner of her street, before we turned, she laid her hand on my arm and whispered mysteriously, "Sam, meet me at the head of the garden to-night. I expect to have a dread secret to communicate. The hour is midnight. And see you have the brick out so as not to keep me waiting!"

So I said I would—but that it was a swot, keeping awake in a fellow's stocking soles—and why not tell me now?

She answered that I did not understand all that was passing in her heart, and that she would never put up with it—never—no, never!

Whereupon I said that no more would I—not knowing in the least what she meant, but doing my best to cheer up my "Co." as in honour bound.

But Myn was not grateful—not a single bad farthing's worth.

She turned on me and told me to shut that portion of my face with which I talked, or I might acquire a permanent grimace if the wind changed. This was rude even for a girl brought up at East Dene Academy, and from Phil Hallamshire's daughter—well, I only wish her father had heard her, that's all!

But after all, angry words are but wind, as Solomon says (or if he didn't it was some other fellow) and they certainly broke no bones. I promised that I should be at the place appointed as the clock struck twelve.

"And mind you," said Myn, "this is serious; so don't you go and make a donkey of yourself by falling asleep like the last time, or start singing, 'Come into the garden, Maud,' with a cold in your head, as you did the time before. You sit up with the brick on your knees, and perhaps that will save me having to wake you up! The time is midnight—because it would be wrong to have meetings of conspirators on Sunday. Even you ought to know that!"

Then a thought came to me—a happy notion that could do harm to nobody.

"Can I warm the brick, Myn? It would be so jolly comfortable on a cold night, if I have any time to wait."

Myn did not see any reasons to the contrary, provided that I kept it out of the sight of mother. It was all the same to her, so long as I was there and made no idiot mistakes. You see Myn had no high opinion of my capacities. She was, in fact, most unjust to me. But on the other hand, perhaps to

comfort me, she sometimes said that if I had been too clever a boy, she would not have cared a dump about me.

This, when you come to think of it, is a very lukewarm, second-table, heated-up-from-yesterday sort of consolation. Not that I cared. Myn could abuse me all she liked. Myn was Myn.

So I went home and set about circumventing (in the most innocent way, of course) my mother. She always made me sing hymns on Sunday night—psalms too, which I liked better. Some of the old Covenanter ones sounded like swords clattering, but they really put too much treacle in the hymns nowadays for my taste. In her heart mother thinks so too, but the tunes fetch her because father liked them; at least she says so—though for the life of me I can't remember any more passionate devotion to them than was expressed by yawning and stretching himself whenever one was finished. But father was a staunch Churchman all his life, and of course sang hymns when they were given out.

Well, I went sliding out at the back door, and soon loosened the brick. It made an awful big bulge under my Sunday coat, so I had to go in again and change that. This I did because it is wrong to destroy things, and because mother would see the green stains when brushing.

I got out a pair of father's overalls with a kind of blouse, which I used for swilling out the yard once a week, early, before anybody was up to see a pupil teacher disgracing himself by helping his mother.

The brick went under that all right. Indeed

almost the whole wall would. It was a compendious blouse. I sneaked into the back scullery looking as far-away and thoughtful as I could, and slid the brick under the ashes of the kitchen fire underneath, in a sort of long place that went under the boiler, so that they could be cleared out that way. "All serene," sang the Orphan Boy, "with his wild brick slung behind him," as it says in the song called "The Wearing o' the Green."

The Orphan's mother never knew. It would not have hurt her if she had, but she would have demanded explanations, and perhaps not have let me go at all. Of course, I should have had to, because Myn said so; but I wanted Myn and mother to pull together as long as possible. I knew the wrench would come some day. Even now I could feel it in the air—sometimes, that is.

No man can serve two masters, and at present I had to serve both mother and Myn. But one fine morning or other the text would prove itself solid, and I should have to choose under which master I should serve.

Or rather the choice would be made for me; and as the reader of these chronicles knows me and the two women, it would be an insult to his intelligence to inform him whether mother or Myn was going to come out ahead. For all that, I meant always to be just as kind as ever to mother, even though I *did* wear a collar with the words, "Myn Sykes—her faithful dog!"

And meanwhile, the brick was heating up under the kitchen range.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT

I KNEW in a moment that this was no Biddy Balmer business. Myn was in dead earnest. She had something on her mind, and only at midnight would I find out what.

I had the devil's own trouble in keeping mother from finding out about the brick. Never in all my experience have I known her poke the fire so often and so vigorously. She seemed to have a regular spite against it. Once she actually touched the brick with the end of the poker, and sent me round to see what was the matter.

Nothing was the matter. How should there be! But I hid that poker. Whereupon mother said it was funny how in this house things that you had in your hand one minute were not to be found the next, either high or low. I agreed with her; but, at least, she let the fire alone after that.

Then there was the trouble of going to bed. My mother always had family worship on Sunday nights in memory of my father, and she did it so well that it made me feel good for all the first part of the week—I say "feel," mind you. I make no other pretensions.

Also she did it Scottish fashion. She could not

quite bring herself down to the Prayer Book and reading her heart's desires from a printed page. Of course, as my father said, what was good enough for all the archbishops and bishops for three hundred years ought to have done for mother, but, being Scotch, somehow it didn't. It is in the blood, I expect. And so she sang "Oh God of Bethel" to the old sacramental tune, and read a chapter from some place in the Bible. Then she prayed a prayer of her own, chiefly, I remember, that her mercies might be blessed to her, and that I might turn out a bright and shining light.

Usually I thought this rather superfluous, for I considered myself a pretty fair son as such things went. But this night, with the end of the brick under the red braize of the furnace, and mother praying away like steam

"That to perfection's sacred heights
I nearer still might rise"——

when all the time I meant to rise in the dark of the night and go out to deceive the old lady—well, I had at least the grace, such as it was, to be thoroughly ashamed of myself for quite a while. So far good. But I meant to go just the same—had to, you see. Myn was pulling the string, and after all, though I was a very fine fellow, I was little more than the tail to Myn's kite.

Then there were other perils. Mother got my candle and fetched her own at the same time. She watched me "make up the fire," made me look to all the doors and windows and report. Then she

led the way upstairs. I did wish I could first have pulled that brick a bit back out of the ashes; but anyway I hove an old ironing blanket on the back-kitchen floor to be ready. The outside scullery door I locked and unlocked pretty sharply, so that the two creeks sounded like one. It was all Myn's fault.

> "Oh, what a tangled web we weave
> When first we practise to deceive,"

as mother said once, when Johnny Armstrong the weaver's cat, pretending to be asleep, fell into his loom and made hay of half-a-web.

Not that I felt particular bad about anything, except that I wished it had not happened on Sunday, with mother wanting me to be just the salt of the earth, which I wasn't, no, not by a long chalk. But I consoled myself with the thought that after all I was doing what Myn told me, and she had always been right. Mother was great on "Special Providences," and perhaps Myn was mine. I hoped so at least, since it had to be as Myn said every time.

It was dark outside—dark as the inside of a black dog shut up in a coal cellar! I wished Myn had had some consideration and waited for a night when you could at least vaguely see your feet. I lay a long time after mother had tucked me in. She did not kiss me, or do any "orphan child" business. No, she only bade me be sure to get up at once when she called me next morning, or she would know the reason why—just as she used to do in my father's time.

And I said "Yes, mother," just the same.

Then she padded up to her own room and puddled about there an unconscionable time undressing and reading her chapters—no doubt thinking of me as already asleep, with a pale, golden aureole about my head. For you know, in spite of perpetually wading into me like a Dutch uncle, mother thought I was the paragon of sons. This did me no harm, and to tell the truth, you never could have told it on her.

I thought the hours would never pass. My candle was not lighted. I did not venture that as I did not want mother to come prowling round to see if I had not been taken poorly in the night. She was always watching for a chance to clap a mustard plaster on me somewhere. Sometimes I was all tartaned over like a chess-board. I didn't mind this much, except when she overlapped, and then the skin came off. There is such a thing as having *too* good a mother. Besides it made a fellow all itchy at awkward times, and if you interrupt a Scripture lesson in order to scratch—well it destroys the tone of the school.

But all went well so far. I got dressed again. In fact I never was completely undressed, only just to satisfy mother. Being Scotch she did not insist upon nightgowns. I had one, indeed, but it was mostly useful for signalling. So I saved it for that. I had also kept on my drawers and socks, so I hadn't much to do.

I was bound however to get that brick. It seemed ever so much farther away in the dark, when I came to rake for it with the tongs. At last I grabbed it and laid hold with my fingers to help it out. The next moment I let go a howl that would have waked

the whole of the East Dene Cemetery if there had been such things as real-for-true ghosts.

Well, I dropped all—so would you—and I shinned upstairs with my boots in my hand, holding on by the laces. Hiding them beneath the bed, I got into bed rather hurriedly, with only my jacket off, and fell asleep.

Yes, suddenly. I wasted no time. I never knew before what "falling into the arms of Morpheus" meant. But I believe, on that occasion, I fell so heavy into them that I must have floored old Morpheus, unless he was pretty steady on his pins.

Well it was that I did so, for the next minute I could hear mother afoot. She poked her head and a candle into my room, but seeing me breathing peacefully among all the "butchiness" of knees and bedclothes drawn up to my chin, she went on downstairs to inquire farther.

Then I thought of that abominable red-hot or white-hot brick that I had dropped at the grid of the back flue in the scullery! She would be sure to spot it. I believe it would have been self-luminous, if it had not been for the candle in her hand.

But I could hear her clattering about among the sticks and umbrellas in the lobby. One of the leaves of the counter came down with a clatter. I think this rather rattled my mother, for she came upstairs again presently, and slid into my room all on tiptoe to watch me asleep. Nobody could be more convincing at that game than I. I even wriggled and murmured a little crossly, like a spoilt child, as if the light bothered me.

Mother promptly whipped the candle behind her,

and went out saying, "He is talking in his sleep, *poor* boy—but it will be all right now. He has settled down for the night!"

That made me feel pretty much ashamed and mean, though not so much as it would have earlier in the evening. For Sunday was getting done, and the nice bad week-days, when you could do anything you liked, were at hand. Besides, I had to look pretty smart or I would catch it from Myn for not being on the spot, and making her wait at the brick-hole. Myn was a bad waiter, though she never cared a piece of slate pencil about how long she made *you* wait.

Anyhow mother settled down better than could have been expected. I heard the creak of the bed, and then standing at the stair-foot could soon make out her "regular breathing." That was what *she* called it, and once docked me of apple tart for a whole week because I said she snored. Mother was particular upon some things. So after that she never snored any more, so far as I was concerned.

Well, I sneaked down, and there was the brick all right—still glowing or pretty near. I lassoed it cautiously in the ironing blanket, and got outside as quick as possible. For the blanket was burning just as my hide had done, but unlike me it could not cry out—it could only smell. But this it did most thoroughly—same as a hearthrug does when a red coal drops out of the grate.

However, I waited for mother's candle. But her room kept dark. So did I—had to, in fact, seeing that there was no light anywhere.

Then I felt my way up the garden. I had a while

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"Nicey——nicey?" I suggested, smacking my lips

He agreed even more blood-curdlingly than befor

So I let him have the brick, dropping it on his no out of the blanket. You ought not to tease dum animals, but then Bully was not dumb by any means— snorting all the time like a steamer's syren on a fogg night. Besides, he had said clearly enough, when asked him if he wanted the brick, that such was h wish.

Well, he had it. He opened a mouth like that c a crocodile of the Nile, made one snack at the bricl got the flavour, and fled crashing through the hedg with one desolating yell. I knew by the way h scratched at Old Miss Easton's door, and told all th world he had had enough of bricks, that he woul respect me ever after, even in the dark—which I ma say he did.

You should not feed dogs at table. It is a ba habit and teaches them to beg. But sitting astrid the two-inch branch of a plum-tree in the dark, it i different. Then it is wise to give them what the want. It is for their good, especially if it be a ho brick.

For the third time that night I gathered up th fallen brick. It was now not much warmer than a old-fashioned box-iron when you spit on it and i fizzles. I did not spit on it, because of my mother' blanket. But as I heard Bully being let in by Ol Maid Easton, I thought what a good respectful do he would be in the future. And my heart was gla within me, because of having done a good action Never be afraid to go a little out of your way, boys

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to spare, only you see, it was better to make sure when you could. For one never knows what may happen with mothers up aloft so affectionate as mine. However, before I went I heaved all that was left in the mustard-can into the sink, and a wise precaution it was, as things turned out. I was quite patchy enough as it was.

It was a night of adventures. I was only about third-way up the garden when I heard a sort of grunting, like a pig that was trying to snarl and laugh at the same time, then a funny scratching and a rustling among the dead leaves at the hedgeroot, and I knew that Old Maid Easton's Bully was bent on trespassing.

Now, I didn't mind so much being chivvied when the brute was on his own ground, but that he should break bounds and come after me when, as it were, my foot was on my native heath, and moreover, the day of the week, Sunday—such double wickedness could not be allowed to go unavenged.

Nor did it. Bully had struck me just at the top of my luck. I was within two feet of our plum tree, of which, of course, I knew every branch and foothold. (It was not so long really since I had been a boy.) I made one spring and got up beyond the reach of Bully's teeth. Then I said pretty names to him which only made him madder, wishing him a Happy New Year and asking if he would like something nice—something to warm him on a cold night. And Bully said, very low down in his throat and trying to embrace the plum tree between his bandy legs, (the ones that grow wide apart and are bulgy in front), that he did want something.

"Nicey—nicey?" I suggested, smacking my lips.

He agreed even more blood-curdlingly than before. So I let him have the brick, dropping it on his nose out of the blanket. You ought not to tease dumb animals, but then Bully was not dumb by any means—snorting all the time like a steamer's syren on a foggy night. Besides, he had said clearly enough, when I asked him if he wanted the brick, that such was his wish.

Well, he had it. He opened a mouth like that of a crocodile of the Nile, made one snack at the brick, got the flavour, and fled crashing through the hedge with one desolating yell. I knew by the way he scratched at Old Miss Easton's door, and told all the world he had had enough of bricks, that he would respect me ever after, even in the dark—which I may say he did.

You should not feed dogs at table. It is a bad habit and teaches them to beg. But sitting astride the two-inch branch of a plum-tree in the dark, it is different. Then it is wise to give them what they want. It is for their good, especially if it be a hot brick.

For the third time that night I gathered up the fallen brick. It was now not much warmer than an old-fashioned box-iron when you spit on it and it fizzles. I did not spit on it, because of my mother's blanket. But as I heard Bully being let in by Old Maid Easton, I thought what a good respectful dog he would be in the future. And my heart was glad within me, because of having done a good action. Never be afraid to go a little out of your way, boys,

to do a kind deed. And afterwards you will feel as good as I did then—or nearly.

Well I had sat perhaps five minutes, perhaps ten, on the summer-seat with my feet gathered up under me Turkish fashion, and the warm brick on my knees wrapped in the blanket, before Myn came. I wanted dreadfully to tell her about Bully, and how he went for the brick. But I knew, somehow, she had something more serious than that on her mind.

There was what they call "a solemn hush" in the air. Myn put her hands, both of them, through the opening of the brick-hole. I tried to take them, knowing that it was some kind of an oath or Masonic sign, and wanting, of course, to play up.

I would have done it too, if it had not been for that blooming brick which rolled out of the blanket, slid off my knees, and nearly made regular lemon squash of my toes! I yowled in a suppressed manner. But happily the wall was between us and Myn took it for emotion and sympathy. She drew my hands towards her and kissed them both. They were wet when I got them back. Then I was sure that Myn had gone out of her mind.

"Bend down—close to the hole!" she said. I did it—my knees on the brick to keep it still.

Myn was sobbing. Good heavens—this would never do! After that I did not care for walls or anything, but climbed somehow or anyhow on to the roof of the summer-house, and dropped down on the far side.

Yes, Myn was crying. I grabbed her in the dark. "Has your father been thrashing you?" I said.

For I could conceive nothing else to make her go on like that. It could not be anything about me, for I had been behaving, and the stamps were all right. Yet Old Phil Hallamshire?—Well, he was too much of a gentleman. Besides, he spoilt Myn—had done all his life.

"Sam," said Myn, wiping her face on my coat-collar, "Sam, you are all I have now in the world!"

"Yes, yes," said I, "I know I am, Myn."

You see I knew you must always humour a luna—I mean one mentally afflicted, even temporarily. So I humoured Myn. It would soon pass, I judged.

"Sam," she said again, tickling my chin with her front hair—me letting her all the time. "Sam, we must get married as quick as ever we can!"

And she began to sob again—it was worse than ever.

"Married!" I cried. Then with a gasp, and remembering my duty, I added, "Yes, certainly, Myn. But why?"

Here was my first mistake. I ought not to have asked for a reason. That set her off, as indeed it was sure to do.

"Oh, Sam," she cried, me trying my hardest to make her speak more quietly by pushing my nose and chin against hers, and saying, "hush, then—hush, Myn! Tell me all about it—tell your own 'Co.'"

This treatment acted pretty well. After a bit she drew back her head kind of proud-like—at least so far as I could see it between my shoulder-blade and the stars.

"I am not wanted at home, Sam. My father

means to marry again," she sobbed. "I am sure he does, and he won't because—because—because—I am in the way!"

You can put in the moist places for yourselves. It was decidedly swampy all about my shirt collar—but not unpleasant, taken as a whole.

"Marry?" I asked Myn, "how can we marry—there's your father, you know?"

Myn waved off the fifth commandment haughtily. She took higher ground.

"I am in his way," she said. "He wants to marry Mrs Egerton Greatorix!"

"Well," said I, "what of that?—She seems the nicest——"

I got no farther. Myn pushed me away violently and tragically.

"Another word," she cried, pretty loud in spite of my chin, "and all is over between us!"

So I did not talk any more, but let Myn, which after all was what she was there for. It was no use me arguing—the reader knows that. If Myn wanted us to get married, or to drown ourselves together in the Thor—why, of course it was bound to happen so. So I preserved a masterly silence. I waited events as if I had been a statesman.

"We must go to Scotland," said Myn. "Oh, I know Gretna Green is all burst up long ago. But if one of us lives there for three weeks, the other can come on, and the job gets done in two ticks, all proper and legal, minister and all correct."

"Very well, Myn," I said, "marriage is a serious responsibility, but——"

"Oh, dry up!" she said, "what we have to decide is who is to stay the three weeks in Scotland."

"Anyway," I suggested, "we have got to make up our minds to it that mother must know. You may have your knife into your father, and for cause. But I have nothing against mother—nor you either—and when my father died, he left me on deck in charge."

Myn meditated so long on this, without crying or doing anything loony, that I was beginning to shake in my shoes lest she should be meaning the thing seriously all the time.

"Yes," she said at last, pensive-like, "that's fair. Your mother does not come into this. I will talk with her. I will explain."

"You'll tell me when beforehand, won't you, Myn," I said, "so that I may prepare the way?"

"Oh, of course," she promised, not paying much attention, however, as I could see.

When the explanation came off I resolved I should have an urgent all-day visit to a distant town on stamp business. I would get permission from Old Currycomb on purpose.

Then Myn returned to the thought which had been keeping her silent.

"About which of us is to reside in Scotland the statutory period (my eye, but Myn *had* been getting up the case!) "have you any suggestion to offer?"

I said I had not. In fact, I never felt more absolutely destitute of ideas.

"Well," said Myn, "have you got half-a-crown? Let's toss for it!"

And we did.

But which won and what happened after that, I won't tell, unless Philips gives me some more stamps. He has got lots.

You write and tell him to do it—quick. Business is slack in the North and our firm has just moved into new premises. So stir him up.

CHAPTER XXIII

A SUSPENSION OF "HABEAS CORPUS"

Now I didn't want to be married before I was twenty. It was too silly when you come to think of it. Consider, if you please, the case of a married pupil teacher and the chaps one would have to lick to keep them from inquiring for "The Missus an' the kids," as the song says. But I still hoped that Myn would not push matters to extremities. If things went badly, of course, the music would have to be faced, because Myn played the big drum in our band.

At first it seemed a mean thing to me to run away with the daughter of a man who had been so decent to me as Old Phil Hallamshire had been. But I was greatly comforted by the thought that it was Old Phil's Millicent who was doing the running away, and that I was the person (if any) to be run away with!

Well, we spun the coin all right, and I struck a match to look at the result, knocking our heads together so hard that Myn made me mind where I was coming. I told her I was coming to look at the half-crown.

It was "Woman" uppermost, which in those days

meant the picture of our Noble Queen, about whom we sang regularly in school "Send her Victoria"—though why she should want another of the same name I never could make out—perhaps to play with on half-holidays, Myn thought.

So Myn had to go to Scotland and make all the nuptial preparations. In a way I was glad, but also more afraid than ever that the affair might go through with Myn at the helm. For Myn considered difficulties as only so many obstacles to be overcome. And, as a matter of fact, they mostly were. I will say that much for her. And in imagination I saw myself standing up before that clergyman already, and Myn telling me to stop shaking!

Cricky—it put me in a funk, nothing but with thinking of it! I put one leg out of bed to run and drown myself in the Thor. But remembering that it isn't nice to be choked, and that the water would be cold and dead-doggy, I resolved to face my fate with a gallant heart.

Besides, there was a whole three weeks before me, and ever so many things might happen between now and the last, the fatal day. There was always time to drown oneself in, if the worst came to the worst. Of course, strictly speaking, I should not have allowed myself to be led away. I ought rather to have had the strength of mind, moral purpose, and things like that. So I had, but for every ounce *I* had, Myn had a pound, and better quality, too. No use blaming me! The woman thou gavest me, etc. I always thought it read as if Adam were rather a poor specimen. But I wronged him. I know now

just how he felt. Eve must have been the split image of Myn.

Nevertheless, it knocked Myn all on her beam-ends to think up how she was to get to Scotland and stay there whole three weeks, without having her father and all the ghosts of all the Hallamshires raking every nook and cranny to find her. She wanted to change off. It would have been, she pointed out, so much easier for mother and me. *We* might have gone off without exciting the least suspicion. But I told her that such a thing would inevitably bring bad luck, and that we had better stick to what the half-crown had said. Myn thought so herself, really. But she didn't like to own me right in the least thing.

Also, she wanted to think out a plan, and like many people, Myn was always sulky till she had done that—got grumps on her chest and couldn't cough it up, as Plato said after sleeping all winter in a barrel. At least if it wasn't Plato, it was some old Greek sage or other. Stamps have a bit blunted my classical education, and my shots at first lesson sometimes make Old Currycomb tear his hair like Sir Ralph the Rover in the poetry book.

But one thing I was fixed on, and that was that I would not forsake mother. Myn said so too, but she had a way of changing her plans in the middle, as it were, and then rapping you over the knuckles for not knowing all about it, as if you had been born with thesecond sight,same as Come-Hither Evan Cameron, the chap who saw the river roaring down to join the wintry sea. Pupil teachers have to know loads of poetry. There were marks given for it in the exams.

After that, well, Myn said I could go home and to bed. She was not crying now. She gave me one of her hands to kiss, and told me to be ready to marry her at the word of command. So I said I would. I had got into a habit of not contradicting Myn, which was like to prove my downfall. And this in spite of the fact that I had read wads and piles about the leading astray of the young, the innocent, and the beautiful. It is all in the *Vicar of Wakefield* and half the novels that are. But I never really knew what it felt like till now. I always thought the youthful and the misfortunate (girls mostly) were dreadful softies who took to weep-wopes on the slightest provocation, and in a general way deserved all that they got afterwards when their venerable par*i*ent with the silvern locks cast them off. But I sympathised now. *I* knew how the young, the innocent, and the beautiful felt. It was my case exactly—with Myn round the corner to give the word of command.

Nobody could call *me* a softy. Why, I could lick every fellow in East Dene, and there were not above one or two in Thorsby, even among the riveters at the works, who would put up their hands to me. Softy, indeed, I can afford to laugh at the suggestion. Me, Sam Brown, a softy! Come out, whoever you are, and I will prove the contrary on all the more prominent of your frontal bones.

If Myn could turn me round her little finger—why, that is no affair of anybody's, except mine and Myn's. And she was my business partner, anyway.

That night and the next day or two Myn did a power of thinking. At least she was as growly as a

male bear, after a smoking concert, with no soda-water in the house. (That's the idea, if the metaphor is a bit mixed.) She snapped at us, if we ventured to speak to her. Mother made her decoctions, each viler than the other and more infallible—which she threw away as soon as mother's back was turned. There was no open rupture, only diplomacy had all its work to do to keep relations from being over-strained. Diplomacy was me, Sam Brown.

I don't know how things would have turned out—I can't imagine, not being a professional imaginer, like the Green Bookers—if one afternoon towards the end of that week Sir Michael Sykes, all togged up in his real Harris clothes, and as jolly and jerky in his movements as a Hallamshire or a knickerbockered sandpiper following the outgoing tide, had not come into our shop, and asked to see all the stamps that we had.

I was at school, and, though mother was all right so far as kids went, and could sell packets with the money in hand (with my father's blackthorn within reach of her hand to promote good relations), she preferred to retire at once in the case of a parlour visitor, and leave Myn alone to sing her little song.

Now, Myn looked like a parlour guest with all the albums to go over, and a good round sum in the till to crow over when I came home from school.

But this day, when I got in, of course my first question was, "Where is Myn?" Mother said that a gentleman had come in and the two of them had begun to talk stamps. Myn had sold him some,

when quite suddenly, with only a bow to mother, Myn and the gentleman had gone out together.

I made mother describe the man. It was Myn's uncle. Certain sure—there could be no other yellowy-green suit smelling of old cabbage leaves and the Board of Health—no, not in all Thorsby. Mother had heard him say that he had come from Thorsby. Sir Michael had looked in to buy stamps (this was my idea) and Myn, finding a good market for—oh, perhaps for the Twelve Pence Canada—had sold it. Then Sir Michael, not having enough money on him, had taken her off with him to his bankers. If ever Myn sells her soul, it will be for ready money. Tick she can't abide. She won't see that the world is founded on taking as much of it and for as long periods as you can get. Think of Methuselah and all these old fellows, how long they would have to lie out of their money, supposing a customer took a little trip to the Highlands for three or four centuries. Shopkeepers with books settled every month or so don't know they are living.

But the fact remained that Myn was off. I did not mind that so much, nor even how long she stayed. It would put off the marriage, and that was so much to the good. But I tell you I made one dart into the parlour and turned up the slot into which the Black Canada Twelve Pence had been stuck in its transparent envelope. My heart beat as I turned the pages. It was there!

Hooray! Myn was a brick, and I would marry her—if the worst came to the worst. But that, at least, was not the reason why Myn had gone off with

her uncle. I must wait to find out. Well, she did not come back that night at all to tell us anything about it. But from her window, with the candle and one of her father's old topper hats, she Morsed the beautiful maritime signal of "Eight bells—all's well!" It wasn't really eight bells. That part was for style, and to throw anybody who knew the Morse code off the scent. Nobody in East Dene did, except the telegraphists, and they didn't care a dump for anything except about their wages, and who went with who to evening church on Sundays. So we need not have minded.

Well, the next morning Myn came and helped mother in the shop as usual. But when I was out the two must have had the talk I had seen hovering in the blue for some time. For, when I came home—lo and behold, there was mother alone and crying! Or rather she had been, and had recently wiped things up. I was sorry and asked what was the matter—though I knew.

She avoided looking at me, and only pronounced these words: "Go to your Millicent Hallamshire Sykeses, whom you care about more than your old mother. As for me I shall go straight to the Poor's House!"

In spite of expecting something I was pretty thunderstruck at this. And so would you, for when I went away mother was debating the question as to whether fried ham laid between layers of potato, baked brown, or plain beefsteak would be best for my midday meal.

Steak and domestic desolation had carried the day.

I had them both together all the time I stayed. I have tasted pleasanter dishes.

Over and over again I told mother that it was in no way my fault, and that if she could preserve me from the altar, or whatever is the thing they have instead of an altar up in Scotland, I should be everlastingly grateful.

But—I put it to herself—she knew what Myn was, and that if she said a thing—well it had got to be. But I might just as well have talked to the dead. Mother would not listen. I was going to forsake her in her old age—if only father had been alive—and so on.

I agreed with this—so far. Because if father had lived, there would have been no use for "Me and Myn, Ltd." But as it was, I did not see if Myn were really determined, what there was to be done. I said that mother would always have the cottage, just as it was, that we were doing a good trade, and no doubt would do a better. She would always have more than enough to live on.

"But I want you, the son I have brought up," she said—"the son your father left me to care for—the son I have lived for! I don't want your cottages—or money—I want *you*!"

I scratched my head, and said that I had no objections, but the difficulty is that Myn wanted me too.

"And you would let that girl come before your mother? Between you and your mother?" she cried.

I denied this with some heat.

"Well," said mother, "what else are you doing? Isn't Myn a girl?"

Come to think of it, she was. But I said that really that should not count against her. I put it to mother—*could* Myn help being a girl? Had she ever acted silly like a girl? Did she not run the business, her father, the house, our house—nearly the town? And after all that to call her a girl like Eva Dacre or the rest, was ridiculous.

But nothing is harder to convince than a woman, especially one's own mother, when one first tackles them on a subject like this. Myn, the villain, had got me into a pretty hole, and then sneaked off with her uncle! But after the school and the "kept-in's" were over for the day, I went home again with a pretty solid weight on my heart. I don't believe the steak agreed with me—too salty, maybe.

Mother was sitting at the receipt of custom—that is, behind the stamp counters, pretending to knit. One solitary cub was trying to make up his mind whether he wanted a penny Nicaragua Green or a tuppenny Hong Kong Blue. I made him select the Central American (because we had most of them in stock) and clear out.

I had thought of some more extra noble arguments for mother—as that I would always be all-in-all to her, and a lot of things like that, which everybody says but nobody seems to take much comfort from, curiously enough.

Also I had got it all ready in my head to ask her how old she was when she married father, and how old *he* was. For I remember well father boast-

ing (pretending to shake his head and be sorry) that their united ages were under thirty-four. Now, though I wasn't marrying for love—nor indeed marrying at all if I could get out of it—still the ages of the firm of Mee and Myn, Limited, taken together, reached the respectable borders of six-and-thirty. We always counted our ages forward in those days, as relatives do on tombstones—"In the 20th Year of his Age!" Now we are not so particular as to that—got out of the habit, maybe. Like the late Queen Isabella II. I tell my wife that she gets younger and prettier every year.

But I never got these comforting and unanswerable arguments pumped into mother's bucket. Hardly had I sat down to wait for tea, when Myn came in, dressed to the nines, and along with her, smiling rotundly and massively, that uncle of uncles—Sir Michael Sykes.

It was the gentleman who spoke first. He had it all made up. I knew by the way he coughed.

"Mrs Brown," he said, "I have a difficult duty to perform. I have made a kind of business of being a diplomatist in my youth, but have recently got a bit out of practice. Still, as the head of the Sykes family I have the honour to ask for the hand of your son in marriage. Yes," he said (smiling with all his pleasant face and keeping down the chuckle very consistently), "his hand in honourable wedlock.

"I will expose the reasons which have forced me to this," he continued. "My brother and I quarrelled. Sooner or later Philip quarrels with everybody. The time has come for him to quarrel with his daughter.

He intends—I have it from his own lips—to marry again.

"The young lady now before you is not unnaturally a little agitated, and sees no way of leaving him entirely free than by getting married herself. Madam, I will lend myself to nothing underhand or incorrect. I will myself attend the young lady to Scotland and take charge of her there. But I cannot go without demanding in due form, and with all the respect due to so serious an undertaking, the hand of your son! I presume—I do not know—that the young people have arranged as to their hearts some time previously."

My mother sat listening as if to a sermon. Sir Michael had a fine voice and, as she owned afterwards, he minded her not a little of Dr Symington the Elder (whom she had heard once in the pulpit at Nine Mile Bar). She was touched by this reminiscence, and with the innate, though not always obvious, good-breeding of the Scottish peasant, she rose and said, "Take him. He has been a good son to me! May your niece prove in all respects worthy of him!"

My own consent was never asked. And they say that the age of Freedom has come, that slavery is no more. Yet here was I, passed over like Uncle Tom, to Miss Myn Legree.

As for "Legree," she only said, "Now, Sam Brown, you are to come on by the first train as soon as you get word. Take the exact money from the till for your fare—not a shilling more—and give notice to-morrow to Old Currycomb that you are leaving the Academy! You hear me?"

I heard—oh, yes, I heard.

And it was for this that Habeas Corpus was signed on the green turf of Runnymede!—not to mention Hampden and Cromwell and Milton and—oh, lots of others whose names I forget.

If those singster girls at the School of Music had been at hand, with Jenny Sands at the head of them, I am sure they would have sung something like this:

"Sam Brown's Freedom lies mouldering in the dust,
But his 'Co.' goes marching along!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His 'Co.' goes marching along!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CONDEMNED CELL

WELL, it was young to leave all the delights of life behind one and go to Scotland to get married. But I felt that I must keep a brave face and not give way. I had not been a really bad fellow, and that, at least, was something to think about now that this had come upon me. I got out *Love's Rosy Petals* and read up the hero's symptoms in the last chapter, when he stood "trembling upon the threshold of his Fate, eager to be united with her whom his soul loved."

"That's beautiful language," I agreed. "But how about my symptoms?"

I canvassed my entire system. Not a ghost of one could I discover. "The heart of young Louis lived in a Paradise of delicious expectative emotion." Mine didn't — not even after looking out "expectative" in the dictionary. This was awkward.

"Louis's eyes shone with a steady, lingering, electric glow as he gazed at his beloved!" Did mine? Well, I was sure not, though I couldn't see. Certainly Myn never mentioned it. Perhaps the installation had been switched off, or the electricity

wasn't working owing to a local thunderstorm, as is frequent in telephones.

Doubtless Old Phil Hallamshire would supply the thunderstorm, when he knew about it. If I hadn't got mixed up in the thing myself without in the least meaning it, I declare that I should have gone and told the old chap all about it. It seemed kind o' mean. But, you see, I couldn't do this without blocking Myn. So there was nothing for it but to give in my notice at the Academy, and listen to mother's homilies as to the stopping of my education.

As far as I could see, that was just about to commence. I was going to begin a lifelong attendance at the classes of Professor Myn, and I wasn't sure whether I liked it or not. I rather thought not. However, after a while, mother grew more accustomed to the notion.

You see the Scotch, though naturally Radicals, have a great reverence for old families and rank. And the fact that Sir Michael was going to boss the job helped—as under-boss, that is—for Myn would be dead before anybody but herself did the real bossing—yes, even Uncle Michael, K.C.B., Governor of the Windward Islands!

Mother began to take an interest and even offered to come North and see me turned off. But that, owing to the shop and the selling of the stamps, could not be thought of. It was all of a mystery to me why Myn was so dead set on leaving her father. But I suppose I should have felt the same if it had been *my* mother who was going to marry again. I *might* have

cleared out, so as not to be crowded, but may I be blowed if I would have thought of making somebody else suffer all this agony just to spite mother. I shouldn't have minded Myn's getting married in Scotland, if only she had not lugged me into it. It was only when I thought how I should have felt, if Myn had not backed me up, that I grew accustomed to the notion. What had to be, had to be—so long, that is, as Myn kept me on a string.

Those three weeks were *bad*. I know now what the poor fellow condemned to be hanged has to go through. When I am prime minister, placed in that proud position by my own consistent mediocrity and the votes of my fellow stamp-collectors, I shall have a law passed, providing that as soon as the death sentence is passed, a noose shall descend from the ceiling of the court, a drop shall open under the condemned man's feet, and (as the reporters write) "Justice shall be satisfied on the spot!" This I shall do, not to make a fine spectacle — though that will be thrilling enough — but in the sacred cause of Humanity.

You see I have been there myself. I know what it feels like—the waiting and all that. Sometimes, wearied with watching and my nerves all gone to pieces with the bluest sort of funk—in such awful situations one does not pretend—I would fall asleep. Then I would dream a dream, a sweet dream, a beautiful dream. I was in a world where there was not a girl, nor a woman, nor a lioness nor a she-tiger nor anything *she*. Housework was all done by touching buttons in the wall. You touched the

button and something electric did the rest. It was lovely and *so* restful.

Well, I was sitting there in the calm afternoon air, watching a little black indiarubber devilkin, marked "24 volts," mending a sock with a ball inside the heel, when suddenly Myn appeared! There was a terrific crash. Devilkin No. 24 disappeared with a smell of burnt gutta-percha. The world crashed into atoms. The sun went out, and Myn said it was time to take a third-class ticket to Gretna Green, so as not to keep the minister waiting!

I woke to find my mother bending over me, crying and dabbing my hands with spirit. She had almost given me up. For she had tried whisky within and without. It had no effect either way. And, though a teetotaler herself, she had been brought up in the old Scottish notion that "it was a gye queer trouble that whusky wadna cure!"

As I say, it was a memorable time. I read books. I would get interested and forget about it for a bit. Then suddenly the memory of my terrible position would return to me, spoiling everything, and making me forget the very plot of the story. Sometimes the awful truth used to hit me "whack" like a sledge-hammer, supposing you had your back to it.

"You have got to be married—ha, ha! HA, HA!"

Thus, if making an innocent fellow-creature suffer was what he wanted, Phil Hallamshire was avenged. I must, indeed, have been fearfully obedient to my "Co." to go through all that for her sake. Why would she not see that things were better as they

were? Why was she in such a fuss to get married—just to spite her father? I even sneaked a book called *Religious Courtship*, by Daniel Defoe, the man who wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, out of mother's chest.

"Now," said I, "I have it." I thought it would be all clear and concise, with short directions as on a medicine bottle, or at least maps and plans as in books of voyages and travels. But no! Not a bit of it. No information. No consolation.

It seemed written after the author had got softening of the brain, or else it was intended for idiots. Certainly it was no manner of use to Sam Brown. So I proceeded to put it back again in mother's chest beside the portrait of my father, all red cheeks and gilt watch-chain. Why she hid it, I can't think. Of all sorts of courtship the "religious" kind seemed to be the worst. I resolved that I should try every other brand first, and the chapters on the "Duties of the Good Husband" nearly turned my hair grey with trying to understand. It said that the G. H. was to inculcate a rigid respect for morality in his family—which seemed to me an entirely previous and superfluous observation. Then it added "by the rod if necessary."

Whereupon I chucked the book into the bottom of the chest—I had been having a last look on my knees. Take a stick to Myn! Well, that showed all *he* knew! Much more likely it would be the other way about, and smartly too!

Then I started on my own account, and thought up ways of getting out of it without exactly leaving

Myn in the lurch. I thought of offering to take solemn oaths to marry Myn that day come ten years or twenty years, provided that Myn let up on me between times. But after I had got this down on paper and had a good look at it, I shoved it in the fire. It was not the sort of proposition one could safely put before an impetuous young woman like Millicent Hallamshire Sykes.

Saying the name gave me a new idea. Why not her uncle? He was a good-looking man and Myn seemed fond of him. But a study of the prohibited degrees in the beginning of my Bible on Sunday morning in church, showed me the folly of such a thing. I did wish I could have got hold of a Scotch Bible. The laws being different there, perhaps that might have been different too. But when I asked mother for one, she said there wasn't such a thing. All Bibles were the same as father's, and she went on to show me a verse in the end or the Revelation which made a fellow crawl. It was about changing "a jot or a tittle," which I'm sure I didn't want to do, not knowing what these were.

But in spite of all this, the swift days of happy life (oh, so happy!) were hastening past, and I quaked and jumped in my chair whenever the postman began to knock far up the street. I only lived again after he had gone down beyond our door.

"Fond of Myn?" Well, yes, of course. I liked my "Co." as much as ever. But what has that to do with getting married and making an eternal ass of one's self? Afterwards, I don't say! Perhaps

when it is time to wear a topper all the time, and grow comfortable in front, when Myn promenades in a black silk that will stand by itself, and wears a bonnet instead of a hat—that would be time enough for us to get married. And I had no idea of being a "foul betray-yer," and "playing Myn false." No, by hocky, I knew better!

> "True as the needle to the pole,
> Although it be not shined upon!"

as the hymn says.

Which I always thought a rather senseless observation, though no doubt well meant. Anyway, that was me! Faithful was no name for me in my relations to Myn, but why was she in such a deuce of a hurry?

It struck me all of a sudden one day that I might write to Jenny Sands and see if she could not do something for me—advise me, that is. She must have had marrying and giving in marriage on the brain a long time on account of that blessed West Indian doctor.

So I sat down and wrote her. This is the letter—

"Offices of Mee & Myn, Ltd.,
"East Dene, Bordershire.

"Dear Jenny,—If you can advise me, please do. I'm in a hole—a deuce of a hole. Myn has gone off it! Nothing will satisfy her but that we must get married on the nail. She has gone to Scotland with her uncle to live the necessary time so as to be a marriageable citizen of that country. I don't know what has taken her, but it is dreadfully hard on a fellow, as you will allow. Every-

thing else was going so well—stamps, shop, all running itself like oiled clockwork. Why then want to mix up getting married with one's good fortune.

"Perhaps, being a girl yourself—I'm not saying you can help it—you may be able to throw some light on the subject. I am getting so thin that my legs don't cast a shadow any more except when I cross them. Sleep has fled my eyelids and all other parts of my body. I cringe before the postman, and have to keep a constant lookout for telegraph boys. This is wearing.

"See if your father can't think of something. Perhaps there is some murder or something for which he could have me arrested for, on suspicion, made an accomplice, say—and yet get me off with a good long term of imprisonment. I should not mind the hard labour. It's the getting married *I* mind.

"Not that Myn and I have quarrelled, mind you! Oh, no, don't dream of it! Far from that. Myn and I are going to stick together as stamp-partners till the end of time. But it is the fag of being married that gets me, and thinking what I shall find to say to her at breakfast next morning. Such an ass as I shall look, sitting dumb and my egg choking me. Besides, it is so stupid anyway, just when everyone was so comfortable and content.

"Tell me about your Doctor. I wonder if he wants a sharp fellow for an apprentice. I shouldn't mind a pretty fever-stricken district. I think I could mix drugs. *He* does not worry your life out. No hurry about him. I should not at all mind that sort of engagement, with the chances of the yellow fever and earthquakes and all. A fellow might be lucky—besides being three or four thousand miles away.

"Write soon and put me out of pain.—Yours affectionately and in despair, S. Brown."

I got an answer back by return of post. And here it is—

"123 Wellington Street, East,
"Elephant and Castle, S.E.

"Dear Sam,—It never rains but it pours, and I am nearly in the same box as yourself. What do you think of that? You were quite wrong about Dr Jack Haslip, as I know to my cost. He has come home in attendance on the Governor of the Windward Islands, to make a special report as to the sanitary conditions of the Antilles. That I shouldn't have minded so much, though he tags after me all the time. But he positively insists on our being married during the next three weeks, and as my father will not hear of it, he also, Jack Haslip, I mean, has gone north to reside with some friends in Scotland (the governor, I think), so that we can be married in that country.

"Now I don't want to leave the School of Music just on the verge of a career, to go and live on an island where there is not a piano within a hundred miles, and where the only music is played by black savages on conch shells.

"But Jack says that his passage is taken on the s.s. *Orinoco* for the 15th, and that he has the option of another berth. If I mean to come, well *and* good. But if not, I shall never see his face again!

"I should be sorry for that, being in a way fond of Jack.

"Now I wonder if you and I couldn't work up something between us. Here we are—two people who don't want to get married, at least by high explosive, as it were. Up in Scotland there are two others who are bent on marrying instanter. There seems to be here what our harmony professor, Dr Tannino Gargala, would call 'the elements of a solution.'

"Suppose that we laid our heads together, you and I,

Sam, perhaps we could find a way out. Could you not run up and see me—at the School, and after take a walk in Kensington Gardens—I daresay we could hit it off. I am sure that there is a way out of it, if we could only find it.—Your affectionate but desolated,

"JENNY SANDS."

"*P.S.*—We have had no more Jersey Treats.—J. S."

This letter nearly took my breath away—to go to London again. But, after all, why not? We really needed a new selection of stamps, and, though Sergeant Sands had been most kind, it would be a great advantage to see our wholesale dealer face to face. The cost would be a mere nothing compared with the advantage to trade.

I would go. It was indeed an obvious duty, and that day duty pricked me like a basting needle forgotten in a lounge chair.

I started the very next day. I bade mother write Myn that urgent business had called me to London, but that all letters would be forwarded. I told mother to delay telegrams as too upsetting. For I knew that Myn would instantly wire the arrival platform for me to return at once by the first train. And I wanted to see Jenny Sands. Duty first—all the rest a bad second.

Evidently it was more than a mere coincidence that our two cases, Jenny's and mine, were so similar. It was what mother called a "Special Providence." I never was more struck in my life. And when I took my ticket I felt as if a burden had fallen from off my shoulders.

As Jenny had said, two heads were doubtless better than one, and what might happen when Jenny and I laid ours together — who could say?

The experiment was worth trying anyway.

CHAPTER XXV

"LOCKERMABEN, 7.45 P.M."

WELL, I got to the big terminus in London, with lots of porters opening carriage doors, and hot-faced (and languaged) old gentlemen pointing out their luggage with sticks and umbrellas. In spite of the press I felt pretty sad and forlorn and spacious internally, just as if I had been a Terminus myself, full of eternal partings and sorrow.

Certainly I had not to worry about my luggage nor even tip a porter. None of them ever looked at me—knowing by instinct who had and who had not the nimble ninepence. I could carry my bag in my hand.

I was just turning to ask my way out when something fluttered up to me. I use the word advisedly—something pretty and princess-robed, with little bows of ribbon just where another girl would never think of placing them.

Jenny Sands—Jenny had come to the station to meet me. My, wasn't I glad? I was not lonesome any more. Neither was Jenny. I nearly danced, only I had a leather Gladstone bag to carry, and Jenny had whole pounds' weight of news to tell me. She took my arm—oh, not like a softy—nothing of that about Jenny. But just to have something to help her to trip along the pavement. And I could

see the people turn about, and smile indulgently at us, as much as to say, "There go two from that station who are not ill-pleased with each other!" As if we were sweethearts! Sillies! And after what Jenny had done for Myn and me at Greenwich Park under the alcoves—though, of course, they could not be expected to know about that.

Well, we left the bag with the grumbly old fellow who was porter at the School of Music, Jenny just saying to him, casual-like, "Friend of mine," and he nodding rather grimly—as much as to answer, "It's all right; I won't tell that black-mugged fellow from the Indies!"

And then we went to a confectioner's, and for the first time in her life Jenny let me pay. At least she was so busy telling me about Dr Jack that she had not the time to think of objecting or Jersey-treating or anything. She got quite excited. Her pale London cheeks had grown vivid, like the bows of ribbon she wore—no, these were liker her lips, being kind of geranium-coloured—the sort of thing they bed out among the poppies and from a distance you can't tell the difference. Then her black hair had got a little blown about as it often did when she was excited or hustled—not that *that* spoilt the effect at all. On the contrary!

She told me all about Jack, and how determined he was, how she would not have known him—it was so long ago—and how he sharply and severely talked to her, like her father and another officer advising the night charges before taking them to Vine Street or Westminster in the morning.

"I didn't mind being ordered about when I was little," she said, with the small, smallest and most pearly kind of tears in her eyes, like mist beginning to blob on a window pane; "Jack could have trampled on me then, but somehow—I—I don't think I could bear it now—not all the time. I suppose he has learnt it in those islands amongst blacks. He thinks he has only to say a thing to have it done—he always was so arbitrary! But now I can't bear it. I can't indeed, and I don't know what to do!"

She looked so pretty, and so much as if she wanted to be comforted, that I wished we had been back under the alcove of the hospital or museum at Greenwich Park—yes, or even at the station. What a fool I had been! Yes, Sam Brown, what a fool to miss a chance like that of doing a kind act—of taking time by the forelock as it were, when a girl like that meets you on the platform!

But in the restaurant—with all those girls of waitresses watching us with eyes like gimlets, even when they pretended to be gabbling to one another—it was not to be thought of. You see they knew all the School of Music girls, and Jenny was the prettiest there. Also the black West Indian had been in, and wanted to smoke, and ordered them about. I found this out later.

So even I was a certain relief.

Well, at first I was afraid it was going to be a frost, my coming to London to see Jenny and get her advice. For (as I might have known if I had had any experience) a girl—a woman, too, for that matter—when she has anything on her mind, never

pays the least attention to what you may say, but pours out her own barrelful of troubles till the spigot won't run any more. All you have to do is to listen and . . . be as sympathetic as time and place will allow.

Then, after that, but not before, she will let you have your turn. And what is more, she will read her own case into every turn and twist of yours. Which makes you mind what you say—or ought to.

At last I paid, and all the girls in the restaurant (or bread-shop, or whatever it was) followed us with their eyes to the door, as if we had panes of window-glass let in between our shoulder-blades.

Once outside, we took a 'bus to Kensington Gardens, getting off just opposite that biggish monument with the marble man sitting under it, and looking so very bird-cagey because of the lots of ledges and perches, all colour and gilding, scattered about everywhere. Jenny did tell me who it was, but I have forgotten. I wasn't paying much attention, I am afraid—a sort of relation by marriage of the Queen's, I think she said.

Once in the woods and with our feet on the short grass it was all right. Jenny had got her mind eased of the exigencies and oppressions of Dr Jack Haslip. It was my turn now.

So I told her how, without the least cause or warning, Myn was going to spoil all our chances, by wanting us to get married and insisting upon it.

"But *why*?" said she, knitting her brows.

"Oh, just to spite her father!" I answered sadly. "She would never have thought of it but for that,

and being her 'Co.' of course I have to play up! It's all in the day's work."

"Then you don't want to get married yourself?" said Jenny, pretty softly, "not even to spite anybody."

We were under a big thick-leaved tree at the time, and she turned square round upon me. Her eyes were as big as pickled walnuts—black like them, too, but all glinty and swimmy, as I have described them before. Sort of "knock-me-over" the effect was when she did that. And I had to tell her not to do it any more. Yes, actually! Pretty soft, wasn't I?

"What?" said she.

"Do keep your eyes still!" said I.

"Well, answer my question," she laughed, so she must have known.

But I had forgotten what the question was. So had Jenny. This was really funny and it made us both laugh.

However, in a minute or two we managed to get the signals to "clear" and the "points" fixed to put us on the rails again. We were all right, both of us—stiff and invincible as the weather-cock on East Dene church—that has a spike driven right through him, well into the steeple, so that he won't turn any more till the Day of Judgment.

We also were no turncoats, and did not mean to be. Jenny was going to marry Jack Haslip, and I—well, of course I was going to stick to my "Co." as long as she wanted me.

"Law of the Medes and Persians!" said Jenny, and we took hands upon it.

Still, neither of us could help this walk in the

gardens, and all that we said to one another, being awfully pleasant. I put it to you—could we? We had such a lot to talk about, you see, and I will own it was precious consoling to have a girl like that, whom people look after and think what a fortunate ass you are.

But all our intentions were without reproach. What we wanted to bring about was the best way of deferring our several marriages—deferring, mind—I say.

But you should have seen Jenny's face when I told her that the Governor of the Windward Islands was Myn's uncle, and that it was with him that Myn was up in Scotland preparing for the fatal day.

Jenny stopped as if a thunderbolt had descended from heaven, and indeed there was something rather thunderous in her face.

"But Jack is with his governor also!" she cried. . . . "They can't be together—impossible! Jack would have mentioned it!"

"Myn would have mentioned it!" I answered, keeping up my end.

Jenny was not so sure of Myn.

I had my doubts about Jack. However, as it chanced, there was a means of finding out. I had had a letter from Myn. Jenny had heard from Jack. I pulled mine from my breast-pocket. Jenny extracted hers, not as the Green Books tell you from her bosom—no woman ever carries anything there except a porous plaster—but from a Patent, maybe Chubb sort of pocket hidden away in the rearward folds of her skirt. It was from Jack. I examined the postmark carefully, like a philatelist.

"Lockermaben, 7.45 p.m." was what both said.

Consequently, they had been posted together! Now there was no Sherlock Holmes in those days—though his creator was one of our customers and a great don in Colonials. But I had read up about Ducocq in some nice history books by a Mr Gaboriau, which helped me wonderfully with my French. So would Dumas, but as his were to be had for sixpence in English, I patronised home industries.

Anyway, Jenny stood "struck," as she said. The coincidence was decidedly rum. "Are you sure that——?" she began.

"Did Dr Harelip——?" I chorused.

"Haslip" Jenny corrected with her first touch of acidity. "No, he never once mentioned the presence of any young lady—only the governor!"

I thought she spoke with a certain hardness in her voice. This pained me, for I was afraid it was a sign of jealousy. Now I was not a bit jealous myself—Myn might stay as long as she liked with the West Indian doctor and I would never have said a word. I have a beautiful spirit that way. But I confess it would have hurt me if Jenny, so sensible in other ways, had been taken like that. And, above all, for a beast of a stubby-bearded, coffee-coloured nigger-driver, who was trying now to drive her in the same way! But at least that must not be permitted. I had suffered long from unquestioned authority myself, patient and unmurmuring, that not for all the blood of all the Sykes, and the Hallamshires to boot, would I permit——

"Yes, Jenny," I said, "please say that again. I did not quite catch the last remark!"

And Jenny repeated it, but differently, nestling a little piano-playing hand into mine as softly as if she were fingering a cradle-song. Myn would have downed me like steam, if I had asked her to say anything twice. But though, of course, Myn was Myn, still a little change was pretty nice too.

On the other hand, I suppose I, too, was a sort of rest from the nigger-driver—for Jenny, I mean.

It was good to be where we were, and presently we sat down on the grass in order to talk more easily. It pleased me to think of all the millions of London circling about us on every side, like on a merry-go-round. I told Jenny this, and instead of telling me not to talk rot, as Myn would have done, she said that she often thought so herself, but never heard it expressed like that before. I ought really to put it in a book.

You see, we had agreed to talk as little as possible about our mutual griefs, but to think up something that would get us out of them without discredit. Also without playing it low on Myn, and—but this I was not minding so much about—the yellow-fever-man from the Windward Islands. Whenever either of us thought of anything, we were to tell the other. And meanwhile, it worked pretty well.

Each of us had our back to a tree—the same tree. It was a rather warm day—warmer a good deal than in East Dene, and Jenny had hurried a lot to get through her work and up to the station. Then, as usual, they had chivvied her about from platform to

platform, nobody being sure where my train would come in. They had a selection of these, and finally it was only by standing on the overhead bridge and keeping a bright lookout, that Jenny spotted me.

Then, we had had our belated lunch, and a good deal of emotion, suppressed and otherwise, so it was no wonder that little Jenny Sands was tired. Like a fool I had not noticed it, and the first I knew about the matter was her head slipping sort of sideways on to my shoulder, and Jenny beginning to breathe long and regular—not like mother's "regular breathing" a bit, but only a sort of gentle up-and-down about the chest, and something on her hair that made the air scented and was nice.

Glory, I thought! What a beast that copper-coloured gorilla of a West Indian M.D. must be, to want to marry a girl like that—against her will! So gentle she seemed, and kind, and natural. I hated him. I rather think I stopped breathing myself lest I should wake her. I would have stopped the thumping of my heart if I could. It sounded unnaturally loud in the quiet of the glade. I had the sense, however, to slip Jenny's hat off. I had often watched the stabbing process of putting it on with interest, never thinking that some day the information so acquired would come in useful. Then I drew my overcoat cautiously about her shoulders, and lifted the buttoned-on travelling hood over her head. She stayed a whole hour or more that way, never moving, except just once nestling down with a kind of clucking, contented sound in her throat, like a baby that turns in its sleep. Somehow, that went to my heart,

and I had to put my arm along so as to keep her from sliding sideways. Had to, you needn't laugh! Do you suppose that, situated as we were, I would have done it for pleasure? During that hour I thought a lot of things—of the first days of our Jersey Treats, of the house and the Sergeant, of her mother, and especially of Jenny that last day on Greenwich Common, when I had seen her go slowly out of sight with the little handkerchief to her eyes!

Oh, yes, I thought and kept still. Sometimes I was angry and wanted to kick somebody, sometimes I was even sort of happy. Sometimes—but I don't know—I never knew I had so many various emotions all knocking around inside me somewhere. And this sitting and seeing that no harm came to Jenny stirred them all round as with a spoon—a whacking big spoon too.

I could see her face now, the profile very regular and very delicate, a little gentle smile, peaceful and happy too—so like a child that one had to look at the corners of her mouth to see that there were no marks of toffee or gingerbread crumbs.

See here, all you fellows, don't you get looking at girls' mouths and comparing them, or thinking how sweet they are. For, if you do, you'll get into trouble, sure. And, if I had not fixed my eye on a distant church steeple, the only thing I could see over the trees—well, I won't just say what mightn't have happened.

It was getting a bit chilly when Jenny awoke. She did this suddenly, sitting up, and then looking back at my shoulder as if it were to blame. The

travelling hood had tumbled back, and the overcoat slid down off her shoulders.

Pretty? Yes, rather—flushed, too, and a little frightened. It made me sick to think of that doctor sweep!

"Where am I!" she said quickly.

I told her, though I daresay the trees and the distant cream-coloured steeple had already told her.

"Oh, Sam," she said with a soft, but not serious, reproach, "how could you?"

I answered that I could not help it. She had been tired, and had just fallen asleep. I had arranged it so that she should not take cold. That was all. There was no harm. Even Jack could not disapprove——

"What Jack?" she said, with a kind of wondering stare at me. This reply sort of landed me gasping like a trout that has been fished out quite unexpected to itself.

"Why, Doctor John Haslip!" I said with marked emphasis, "of the West Indies!"

"Oh, *him*!" she answered lightly, with a pretty carelessness which included also grammar.

Did you ever see a girl who has been asleep like that do up her hair? I tell you it is worth seeing. Everything is worth seeing—once—from an execution to a Kindergarten Treat. But this more than most things. You see, Kensington Gardens is not a lodge in some vast wilderness. So Jenny had to take out the hairpins, hold them in her mouth, keep up her hair, give it a shake out, do it up again, always with her face to the nearest intrusive stranger. Yet

all done so naturally—no fuss, no haste even—just her clever fingers playing all about her head, never making a mistake, but taking the hairpins one by one out of her mouth till all was done. Then came the hat and the two big pins, which she sent smack right through the straw apparently right into the grey matter of her brain. She pulled on her long gloves, and said, "Now, then!" without ever thinking anything about it. But it beat Maskelyne and Cooke—oh, to shivers.

And yet you just listen to a man who has to shave himself on a cold morning, or even do his half-inch long hair in the dark. I began to see that girls are away ahead of us in some things.

Leaving the gardens we took the Blackfriars' 'bus, got my bag on the way, and both of us went out to 123 Wellington Street East. We did not talk much. But Jenny was looking fresh as a daisy after her sleep. She did not make fun or anything, only smiled when our eyes happened to cross.

Each of us had in our several pockets a letter from "Lockermaben, N.B." postmarked 7.45 p.m. But to these we did not refer again. Each of us had a plan for averting misfortune, yet we did not compare notes. Night would bring counsel, and I believe both of us were rather glad to have a day off.

At sight of us together, good Mrs Sands in her eight square feet of garden, held up motherly hands.

"Why, Sam Brown, what in the world brought you here?"

And I answered her simply, telling the frozen truth, "Jenny!"

CHAPTER XXVI

MARTYRS AND CONFESSORS

What a time that was! First, Mrs Sands had to put my room in order—goodness knows it was apple-pie enough before. All the same she had to do it for conscience' sake. And Jenny had to keep me company in the parlour till her mother was finished. I had some stamps and things in my bag—all pretty rare, that I hoped to sell in London—yes, even the little square of black V.R.'s and the Canada Twelve. I had plunked my bag at my feet, and I fished them out just as I could find them in their pasteboard booklets with thin leaves gummed up like pockets between.

Yet in a little while I was off my chair and showing them to Jenny with the book laid on her knee. She crooned sympathy. It was like singing to hear her. She understood directly, though, of course, she knew nothing about it—only what she had picked up when going with her father to buy wholesale stock for the business.

Upon my word I don't know how I ever got off that chair on which I had sat down. It certainly was good solid haircloth and polished mahogany, the pride of Mrs Sands's heart. There was no trick about it. And I know that I had sat on it, because there was my bag at its off rear foot.

But certain it is that I found myself sitting beside Jenny, and that I could feel her smile, even when I was not looking, by a kind of warmth on the side where she was, same as if you were sitting pretty close to a German stove. Ever feel like that? Pleasant, yes! But rather disconcerting, I found it.

We sat that way a good while, and though I had gone over all my finest stamps three times, and Jenny had said "I must *really* go and help mother!" still there seemed to be something wanting—something left undone that ought to be attended to.

Then quite suddenly, without in the least making it up or knowing of it beforehand, Jenny and I looked at each other, and our lips drew together. They stayed like that ever such a while. It was a sort of glorious unconsciousness. And then, drumming and thundering in our ears, shame and anger and destiny, and oh, I don't know what, jerked us apart. We could not look at one another.

"Oh, Sam!" cried Jenny, bursting into tears, "we should not have done that! You *know* we shouldn't. Think of Millicent Sykes!"

"Think of the West Indian fellow!"

"Oh, it was wrong—so wrong—we shouldn't—we mustn't!"

I said it was all that, but somehow I couldn't bring myself to say I was sorry. I knew I ought to have been, but, as a matter of fact, I wasn't. A sort of proud joy, a gladness that Jenny could not take it back, that it would never be quite the same again between us—a light-headedness and light-limbedness as if I were walking on air in a dream—made the blood

run like mad through my veins, at least I suppose it was my veins.

But I went on pretending. For really this had brought the whole thing to a head. I thought, sitting there holding Jenny's hand, and the stamps, worth ten times their weight in diamonds, scattered unheeded about the floor, that though I only cared about Myn as one boy cares about his chum, though I did not want to marry her if it were ever so, the affair might look quite different if it were a question of marrying Jenny Sands!

With this once clear I could read back lots of things that had never left my mind. Oh, it was dreadful—to think of being untrue to Myn. I wouldn't be. I would die first.

Then the devil or some selr advocate went on whispering inside me. "You can't be unfaithful when you never have been faithful! You know that in your heart you have always liked Jenny better."

And, through all this, something went clacking away like a brake on a railway waggon going downhill pretty fast, say at the summit or when she gets her nose over the Shap Fells. "Lockermaben!" it said, "Lockermaben! Clack — Clack — Lockermaben! Lockermaben! Seven-forty-five! Clack, clack!"

But I did not see at the moment the bearing or that on the question at issue. You see Jenny was occupying my attention. She cried, not from sheer anger or disappointment, like Myn, but as I never saw anybody cry before—my experience of girls being limited. She cried till the hands which she held palm-inwards before her eyes were full. Then the

tears forced a way through. Drops pattered down on the crimson bows and on the front of her dress.

"Oh, Sam, it was wrong—we shouldn't—we shouldn't!"

That was the pattern of her litany. But she never blamed only me, as Myn would have done. Somehow it seemed some awful thing to her, and she shuddered at the thought of it. At least I suppose that was it. Anyway she shuddered. Yes, so that I had to hold her. To me it did not seem so different from the time under the Hospital arcades.

But she pushed my hands away and pointed to the seat beside my bag. I gathered up the scattered stamps. Then I went and sat stupid, watched her sobbing, and felt (and I have no doubt looked) like an ass.

"Jenny," I kept repeating, "Jenny—listen! It isn't anything."

"Oh, don't speak of it!" she said, and so relapsed.

After a while we heard Mrs Sands coming downstairs. She came like a stumbling elephant. You would have thought that she wanted to make as much noise as ever she could, which, of course, is unthinkable. Then she coughed, and even tripped on the mat. Something called her off into the kitchen, and she rattled tins there. Finally we heard her coming back again. And when she turned the handle of the door, Jenny was all smiles again.

"Thank you, mother," she said, as if it had been *her* room she had been doing. And then turning to me she added, "there is some use in having a mother like that, eh, Sam?"

I said, "Yes," but that she really ought not to have taken all that trouble about me. I could have put up anywhere, coming upon them like that!

But from Jenny's look at me, I am not sure whether she meant that or something else.

At anyrate we were both agreed that it was a pretty serious fix we were in, and would take some disentangling.

"You see," said Jenny, when her mother had gone to get tea ready, "it is better to be plain with one another. We are both engaged to be married to two persons of very strong character, and that within the space of three weeks. Well, Sam, from what you wrote me, you would rather not marry a person of so decided a character as Millicent. To put it plainly (there is no use doing otherwise at this stage), you would rather marry me—that is, if you had to at all. To be candid, so would I, Sam! I need not tell you that, after what happened ten minutes ago. I was to blame. You were to blame. But me the most, for you are only a man, after all, and perhaps could not help it just. I was a girl and saw it coming.

"But, Sam," she went on, "there is such a thing as sticking to one's word, and I am sure that you mean to stick to yours. I wouldn't care about you if you didn't. I will to mine, whatever it costs me. I was a silly little fool when you were here the first time. I played with fire and of course got burned. I never really knew how badly till I sent you that time to find Millicent at Greenwich—to make it up with her. Do you know what I did? Oh, it was awful. I am ashamed to tell you. When you went on that

boat and sat in the front, I slipped on by the back gangway, and got behind the funnel where the smuts are worst, and from there I watched you.

"Horrid, wasn't it? And when Millicent and you talked together and I could see you had made it up, I bit my handkerchief to shreds with rage. I did, indeed. It only got dried—the rags, I mean, because I was too sorry to be able to cry any more. Now, what do you think of me?"

But of course in the circumstances I could not tell Jenny what I thought of her—except that I had often felt pretty much as she did, especially since Myn had taken this nonsense about getting married into her head.

Jenny gazed at me, trying to make out how much to believe. I was just itching to comfort her again. I felt then that that was my real mission in life.

"Keep on your chair!" she said sharply. And I kept. Jenny told me afterwards that she respected me for being so honourable. But I really think that at the time she would have liked me to be a little more enterprising.

However, we loved honour more, as the song says, and Jenny and I had to put up with things as they were, though at the far-back and hinterland of things, neither of us were really responsible. It was just the nature of humankind, including young men and maids.

However, we meant to do the square thing—rectangular as a diagram with four angles each of ninety degrees.

"See here, Sam," said Jenny, laying her hand on

mine, as she always did when she wanted to be extra persuasive—a little way of hers, "what do you say to telling my father? My mother is as good and sweet and wholesome as the meals she turns out for love of us. But, you see, father has had a lot of experience, and though a policeman, he has kept his heart pretty warm under the blue. As it is, he has about enough Royal Humane Medals to make a breast-plate. More than that, he likes you, and he would not let either of us do anything mean, or that we might be sorry for afterwards."

I did not much care for this proposition at the first. But Jenny patted the back of the hand I had extended on the table, and I became convinced that it was the best thing we could do. The hole we were in was certainly a pretty tight one. And if Sergeant Sands could help us out—he was Inspector now, but we all still called him by the old name—well, it would certainly be a happy day for both of us.

We were sure of having the evening to ourselves. Mrs Sands always went out after the Sergeant came in, and she had watched how he enjoyed his tea. It was her hour. Also the hour of her neighbour Mrs Pragnell along at No. 28. They had a fresh brew of tea together, which they decanted into their saucers and drank with their dress skirts comfortably turned up and their feet on buffets. Each had known the other all their lives, and they had had a tiff regularly once a week and a long, level-toned confidential gossip every single day all through these years. One of Eliza Pragnell's chairs fitted the shape of Sarah Sands when she leaned back, and her

heels, broad and low, had worn the cord of the biggest foot-buffet almost to the sawdust.

Sergeant Sands was delighted to see me. He liked me, as Jenny said, and, of course, I liked him. I don't know whether or not he had any idea why I had really come to London, or whether he just thought it was an ordinary matter of stamps and dealers.

At anyrate, he did not appear in the least surprised when Jenny told him that she had met me at Euston, and that we had gone a little walk in the park to talk things over first. She did not, however, say anything about falling asleep, or about what had happened in the parlour when Mrs Sands was upstairs. But I rather suspect from what came after, that the good man guessed more than we gave him credit for.

"Better make a clean breast of everything," said he, between two puffs of his pipe, looking at us kindly and steadily under his lashes, narrowing his eyes to keep us both in focus at a time, so that I'm blessed if you could have told which one of us he was looking at at any given moment.

"Go on!" he said.

It was Jenny who went.

"This is the letter Sam wrote to me," she said. "Sam has got mine in his breast-pocket, along with another which I should like you to see."

"Umm!" said Sergeant Sands, having perused Jenny's and mine. We showed him the other two, postmarked—"LOCKERMABEN, 15th—7.45 P.M."

"This is from Dr Jack," said Jenny.

"And this from Miss—from Myn, I mean!" I added.

He looked up at me, and then over at Jenny before attending to the letters.

"*UMMMMMMM!*" he said. There was ever so many more "mm's" in it this time.

Then he set about making comparisons professionally and with method. His science went far beyond mine.

"Ink, paper, *and* pen identical—the first two certainly—the latter probable. Phrasing also very similar. I should say that whoever wrote the second letter with the hotel pen had the first before them as a guide."

"Well, I bet it was Myn who did the bossing, if any," I remarked, "but I don't see the meaning of all this."

"Ah!" said the Sergeant, as if that were very likely indeed.

"Jack certainly would never take the least advice from anybody—you may depend upon that," said Jenny, "he has got so arbitrary!"

"*Umpha!*" interjected the Sergeant, gazing at the two "Lockermaben" letters as if they had been forged hundred pound notes, or perhaps doubtful Trinidad woodblocks.

"Well, let's hear what *you* have to say, Mr Sam Brown!" He looked up at me. I made a poor appearance, which perhaps did me no harm with the policeman. I had very little to urge that was convincing, and that little I said badly. The Sergeant shook his head.

"My turn!" he said; "now keep quiet, young people! Listen to me. First, don't think that the world is over for you whatever happens or has got to happen. Love troubles at twenty are, as a rule, not dangerous—certainly not permanent. But you, Sam Brown, are pledged to the hilt to Miss Millicent Hallamshire Sykes, niece of the Governor of the Windward Islands. You, Miss Jenny Sands, are as completely promised to Dr John Haslip, that same Governor's private physician and secretary—it is a coincidence—quaint, but nothing more!

"Now so far as I understand you—which is a fair distance ahead—you neither of you want to marry anybody—except, perhaps, each other——!"

At this, Jenny and I jumped from our seats, as if simultaneously jerked by powerful springs concealed in the stuffing.

We denied vehemently — perhaps even too vehemently.

"*AH—UMMMMM!*" said the Sergeant.

But we bore our point. It was impossible. It was contrary to all our noblest principles. We had resolved. A promise was a promise and should be kept whatever the cost—yes, whatever——

But, at this point, Jenny, overcome with her own nobility, sat down again and began to cry.

"Stop that!" said her father; "remember that this is a proper cabinet meeting, and what would the Prime Minister do if the Home Secretary started blubbering? You are Home Secretary, Jenny. Sam, there, is Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and I am Lord Chancellor, Solicitor-General, and Lord Advocate

rolled into one. I am the Law. The Law errs, but can do no wrong. Now attend!"

We attended and except for a little cluck in her throat (about three to the minute) Jenny was a model Home Secretary.

"Leave is about due me now—long leave," said the Sergeant. "Last year I took none, owing to that Blue Diamond case, when the French Government asked for the loan of me—you remember."

I did not remember, but I had been told not to interrupt. So I nodded.

"Well, what would you say, Mr Brown, and you, Miss Sands, if I, Sergeant Sands, taking both of you with me, were to set out on a little tour to Scotland. The railway people will be glad to give me passes. I have been of use to them more times than I have fingers on both hands and toes on my feet. No trouble about that! Now, Missie, this will be a deal better than slipping off to marry a man I don't want you to marry on the sly—slipping off (as you meant to do) without any parental blessing, and very likely a hitch in the legality at the farther end.

"No, if you have to marry Jack Haslip, Miss Janet Sands, it is fit and proper that your father should be there."

"But I don't want to at all—*now*," began Jenny. Then she remembered her duty. "Well, if I must, I must!" she cried, "but, for one thing, I shall never be happy, and my blood shall be on the heads of those who made such unjust laws!"

"What unjust laws?" said the policeman, much astonished.

"Why, to make a poor girl marry one man when she likes another better!" cried Jenny.

"But you promised, you know!" said her father, severely. "It wasn't *my* doing."

"I know I did promise—but how was I to know?" retorted Jenny.

"Know what?" queried her father.

"Well, about Sam!" sobbed the Home Secretary, relapsing.

"Don't be silly," said her father. "Take a dab of Sam's handkerchief—yours only wets you more. And you, sir (here he turned to me), I say to you that you don't know what is good for you. You are engaged to marry the niece of the Governor of the Windward Islands—you, the son of a railway porter. Why, you ought to be glad and proud——"

"I am—oh, I *am*!" I cried in agony; "ask Jenny!"

But Jenny grew rigid and seemed to see right though me into the opposite houses.

"Only I don't want to marry—not now—not *her*!" I added, hardly knowing what I said. Jenny unstiffened and looked anxiously at her father. We both wondered what he was going to say next.

"And so you come to London, pretending to buy stamps for the firm, and you are met at the station by the daughter of a policeman, a common policeman."

"No, no, father!" cried Jenny, "you are an Inspector!"

"Who can't even keep his own family in order! Young man, you are very much to blame! The

sooner you are put out of the reach of such designing minxes, the better——!"

"Oh, father!" cried Jenny, really angry this time.

"Yes, designing minxes, I say, though it is of my own daughter, and it is a hard thing for a father to acknowledge. She really made up her mind to it from the first——!"

"I didn't—I never did!"

And Jenny flounced out of the room in a perfect surge of tears.

The police-officer smiled blandly.

"That was somewhat strongly put," he went on, "because I have a word for your private ear. I believe that Jenny would be a great deal happier with you than with that cold-blooded shark, besides being her cousin. *He* wants someone who would master him, and he shall never have my daughter with my consent!

"As for you, Mr Sam Brown—you have made your bed and you must lie on it. You cannot, on mere business grounds, desert your acting partner. Nothing is more clear than that. For you there is no hope. You will have to go through with it. So see and do it with the best grace possible. Moreover, I trust you to help me to keep Jenny's spirits up till you and Miss Millicent Sykes are married!"

"*Ooooo-Hoooooo! ! ! ! ! Huck-huck-huck! Ooo-hoo!*"

These curious sounds came from behind the shut door. The Sergeant jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"I knew she would listen," he said; "now she has got it. She will go to bed and cry herself almost happy. Then to-morrow she will come down with a face like a martyred angel. Mind you don't disturb that expression. It will be Jenny's greatest consolation. And as for you, Sam Brown, you had better sit down and write a long letter to Miss Millicent Sykes. Try to tell as few lies as possible. For me, I shall further revolve in my mind the interesting postmark of these twin letters:—

"LOCKERMABEN, 15th, 7.45 P.M."

So, after all, it seemed that Jenny had a fair chance of getting off, and that it was I who had been chosen to be the sacrifice—the "altared" angel.

CHAPTER XXVII

NEARING OUR DOOM

TOGETHER Jenny and I bought stamps all the next day, while her father went to headquarters about his leave. It was wonderful what Jenny had picked up of the business, and how she could beat down prices. She did not hector like Myn. She smiled, first to tell the man that, in her opinion, he was a nice man. Then again to say that he must be funning to ask such a price, and then came a quick twitch of the corners of the mouth—nothing but that—to intimate that she, Jenny Sands, knew all about it and that it really would be better for all parties if he were to recognise the fact. He usually did.

Then Jenny would return to First Position and re-intimate that she had not been mistaken. He *was* a nice man.

I have seen people standing about a foreign customs'-house, looking as sulky as only a bear or a travelling Englishman can be—bales of trunks and snappy officials everywhere, and Jenny Sands, smiling at this one and that other, so sweetly, so innocently, that in five minutes her luggage was on the first 'bus—the 'bus which really belonged to one of the sulky Englishmen. Ah, well, what did it matter if the world were brighter for these smiles, and if, for a

moment or two at least, certain hangers-on at such places learned that there was something better than a tip. And more powerful.

Well, between us, we got the stamps. The Sergeant got his leave—four whole weeks, enough for the old heavens and the old earth to pass away, plenty of elbow-room for any number of my mother's beloved Special Providences. I would have given a lot to know what was going to happen during that period. Perhaps, however, it was just as well that I did not.

A trite remark, which it is quite safe to make on any occasion whatsoever! Still it does make you fearfully moral and copy-lineish, taking your life in your hands like that, and perhaps—well no, I had heard that *there*, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. But suppose now, a nice railway accident or something!—Well—even that would not be so bad—if Jenny Sands were in it too. I did not want to die and leave her to the tender mercies of that banana-eating West Indian.

Of course I didn't want to die if I could help it—just as I didn't want to get married. But with Jenny to stand by, I could not help feeling that the wind would be considerably tempered in both cases to one shorn lamb.

It was a brute of a long way to Lockermaben. And when we got there it was only a little, raw-beefy town built of a very ugly local sandstone of that colour. From a distance it seemed to consist chiefly of church steeples. There were, in fact, seven for the two thousand inhabitants, and there was news of an eighth—the minority of the Original

Seceders having again seceded and were worshipping meanwhile in the Oddfellows' Hall.

Before leaving London, however, the Sergeant had written a letter to Miss Millicent Hallamshire Sykes, Care of Sir M. H. Sykes, K.C.B., at the Annandale Arms, Lockermaben, N.B. I think he came near dating it 7.45 p.m. But, anyway, he didn't.

"Dear Miss Sykes," said the Sergeant, "your last honoured epistle about the sets of Jamaicas duly received and replied to, the order being filed to your desire. Since then we have had a visit, entirely unexpected by us, from your business partner, Mr Brown, who acquaints me with your intention of immediate marriage in Scotland. With regard to this I have, of course, nothing to say, as I understand that you are under the high and exceedingly proper protection of your uncle, the Governor of the Windward Islands.

"As a policeman, formerly employed on railway platforms, I cannot help congratulating your fiancy (if that is the word) on his approaching elevation. It is not given to many lads of his age, the sons of local railway porters, to marry the heiress of the Hallamshire Sykes's estates—for such I understand you to be. I am writing by the same mail to Dr John Kenneth Haslip, the secretary of the Governor, and presently engaged to my daughter, to do all that lies in his power to make your stay in Scotland a pleasant one. You will not be astonished to hear that he has similar prospects to yourself, and it may prove agreeable to compare notes with each other. He has great energy, much and varied knowledge of the world, and altogether—though I acknowledge my opposition to a match between cousins—I consider it a marvel that he cares to sacrifice

his prospects in life by marrying the daughter of a common policeman. However, Love has no law, or rather is a law unto itself, and I suppose that young people know their own business best.

"Believe me, dear Miss Millicent, that I am now as always,—Your obedient servant, J. SANDS.

"H. M. Metropolitan Police Force."

Even after we had started Mr Sands would not allow us to hurry, nor yet to go near East Dene. I don't know what he had written to my mother—something quite satisfactory, you may be sure.

He also wrote frequently to his future son-in-law, the yellow-fevered, jaundiced, half-caste mulatto of a West Indian doctor. *I* would not have written him a single line, but the Sergeant seemed to have got deucedly fond all of a sudden of the copper-coloured ass—after forbidding the marriage too. I could not in the least understand this. I hate people who chop and change. *I* would not have believed it of the Sergeant—Jenny's father, too, and bound to protect her by the first laws of nature. But you never can tell folk till you have found them out.

But the towns that we visited that first week, the cathedrals that Mr Sands dragged us through, you would not believe! I never imagined there were so many in England. I could not but think how my poor father would have enjoyed it all. Then the vergers with the keys and the professional stoop, the ground glass windows—I mean coloured! After all, it was not so pretty as I can do it with sixpenny transfers, only older—so, at least, they say—as if *that* made it any prettier!

The only let up was the "view from the top." Jenny and I loved these views from the top. You see, the Sergeant liked going outside and thinking out things over a pipe. The stairs were all nice and twisty, and Jenny had often to stop, owing to shortness of breath. I could not go on and leave her. I was not such a beast.

Jenny sometimes cried, and then I did my best to make her feel good—a fellow would have been a brute to do otherwise. I have always been considered rather feeling-hearted. Besides, there was something tragic about it, too—beat Hamlet and all that lot into a cocked hat.

For just think of it. Oblige me by thinking of it. Here were we, neither of us in the least to blame, being personally conducted to our DOOM by a policeman! No chance of escape—alas, none! Our fate was all too plain.

Yet, in spite of this, the whole thing was being made into a picnic! Now in Hamlet and Macbeth and Faust, as I saw them at the Lyceum, at least they conducted things which were tragic in a tragic way. You could feel it was tragic even when the gravedigger was tossing out the bones, and cracking his jokes, and the witches, and the devil in red—they all knew their business. They all behaved as such.

But here were we up to our eyelids in the blackest tragedy, and yet raking cathedrals and picture-galleries all day, and at night shooting for sticks of toffee at a penny stall. The Sergeant was a good shot and we could hardly get him away. He would have us try too, and the only comfort I had was when I nearly

plunked the showman in the eye—the only one he had left—so that he used bad language and carried on till the Sergeant showed him something under the lapel of his coat that gave him the shakes worse than my bullet.

We thought that week was never coming to an end, Jenny and me. But the Sergeant was calm. I suppose that it is getting old that makes people so cold-blooded.

"No use going before the three weeks are up," was what he said. "It would be downright cruel to keep two pairs of young hearts (that beat as one) apart an hour after the day appointed!"

Jenny and I looked at one another. How often do those who are the nearest and dearest misunderstand the feelings of the young. We explained this to each other at length as we took breath half-way up the next cathedral tower.

What a noble ideal, these heaven-pointing towers, and aspiring turrets! What Faith must have inspired their builders! Can we poor grovellers do anything like that nowadays? I believe not. Jenny is of my opinion. We think that these old chaps were among the greatest benefactors of the human race. A monument ought to be raised to them—a tower, with corkscrew stairs and seats to rest on at every turn, nice little narrow lattices of the period, and the motto, "We wrought not for ourselves, but for posterity!"

Which was all right. For, you see, by the time the towers got finished the architects would be quite old chaps, like the Sergeant, who was content to sit

and puff his pipe outside. Catch him up a cathedral tower! "No, thankee kindly," he would say. But as an idea Jenny agreed with me that the monument was good. It won't be carried out though, you'll see. For it's the old people who have all the tin, and real benefactors are scarce—those, that is, who know what the young really want.

Still, all this was like jesting on the edge of the drop. The rind of the fruit was a little sweet, when we forgot about things. But the inside, when we remembered, was like the Dead Sea Apples you hear about in church.

Still our old man would not hurry for anybody. I never knew any sensible man, the pride of his profession, so trifling. He would wag one leg over the other and stare at the toe of his boot by the hour, quite contented, smoking his pipe, *of* course. And if you asked him what he was thinking about, he would smile calmly, wave the stem of his briar in the air, and say—to Jenny and ME, mind you—"Ah, what, but for me, would come of you two, and of those two anxious lovers, waiting for the time to be up, away in Scotland yonder?"

He also told us that we had much better "curb our impatience," that "young people never knew when they were well off," and (here he sighed) that "maybe some day we would look back and long for the days when we were still happy and free!"

Happy and free, indeed! That was all he knew! With that crushing load on our minds—two loads rather—only made tolerable even for a week by the fact that Jenny had offered to carry half of mine,

whilst I, not to be outdone, had said that I would carry the whole of hers.

This was satisfactory enough as a statement. But, really, if I had been brought to the proof, I could not see how I could make my words good, except by shooting the Sawbones of the Windward Islands. Then, as like as not, he would extract the bullet, marry Jenny, and get me ten years for attempted assassination.

That, on the surface of things, would always be something.—But Myn would be sure to wait for me most faithful all the time, run the business, run the head jailer, run the prison and the turnkeys, and be ready to run me as soon as I was released for good conduct—or even let off through the influence of the Governor, her uncle—whom may the angels bless for his intermeddling.

Well, I preferred the scaffold—but, after all, what had to be had to be. We worked each other up to such a pitch of self-sacrifice, that I verily believe Jenny would not have been satisfied unless the West Indian nigger-driver had applied the cat-o'-nine-tails to her every day after meals. And I certainly should have been disappointed in Myn, unless she had administered daily doses of slow poison in order to collar the V.R,'s and the Twelve Pence Canada all to herself.

Anything so dead noble as the two of us when at last we steamed into the junction of Lockermaben has not often brightened this dull, old earth. We were like the brick under the oven, self-luminous. If we had been "taken" then (according to mother's favourite expression), there would have been no diffi-

culty. Our future was assured and the premium paid. It was a pity that they could not have fetched on one of those old railway accidents they are so handy with, just after you have been behaving like a beast. I have often said since, that Jenny and I missed the best chance of being sainted that is ever likely to come our way. That would have been something for our —I mean our friends' children, to remember us by. Fancy them dating their letters :—

"The Eve of Saint Jenny's Day!" Or "The Feast of Saint Sam Brown, Second-Class Saint"—as they mark them in the real Breviaries. Yes, they do. I have looked. "Second Class," even then, was as high as I could have looked for. But all the same it was a good chance let slip. A man at the points' box rather sleepy (after a sixteen hours' shift and no let up) might have put Jenny and me in the way of permanent promotion. But instead, there was a good-looking, fresh-coloured man who waved his hand to our driver, and asked after the latter's wife, careless of what he had made us miss. Oh, the selfishness that there is in the world! All that *he* cared about was getting our train safely past. He never so much as gave a thought to our real weal or woe, and the good he might have done by turning us on to the up line, right slap in the way of that coal train!

It was a long platform, and looked like its name— "Lockermaben, N.B." There were some flowers in greyish-green borders, trying for the prize given yearly by the company for neatness and prettiness. In this competition Lockermaben was noted. It came out Second Wooden Spoon, being beaten only

by Carstairs as the ugliest railway station in the world. But, of course, against Carstairs there is no use competing. That weird junction really ought not to be allowed to enter, except in a class by itself.

We had all bags in our hands, and got ready to descend. Jenny and I had faces—at least to judge by Jenny's, like that of Inquisition victims after the Greater and the Lesser Questions. We had done the last, last little bit of comforting, and said a long, a last good-bye to each other in the Halmyre tunnel three miles down the line—which, happily, also was long. There was nothing for it now but to have our hair cropped, and march firmly to the drop. *They* would be waiting for us with the necessary papers.

As the Sergeant went to the window and looked out at the long array of luggage-trolleys and the entire absence of porters, Jenny took my hand quickly, and with that dreadful "cluck" in her throat and a face like—well, like one of Sir Noel Paton's pictures (in the guinea engraving), she said, "Good—bye Sam!"

And I said, "Goo—goo—bye, J-J-Jenny!"

But the next moment both of us were brave and calm, and faced the worst with the stern courage of the regiment that went down on board the *Birkenhead.* Courage has not died out in the race. You could see that by the way we gripped on to the handles of our Gladstones, and stepped down. There was high-hearted gallantry in the mere way we gave up our tickets upon demand.

Then, sole on that long, windy platform, we espied —who do you think?—No, not our loves—nor yet

our fiancées—into whose arms we had screwed up our courage to fall.

No—not them nor any one of them! But instead, Sir Michael Hallamshire Sykes, K.C.B., Governor of the Windward Islands.

He came forward hastily. He seemed perturbed. He took the Sergeant by the arm and said, "Are you Mr Sands?"

The Sergeant said that it was so.

"Then," said the Governor of the Windwards, "you have my sympathy. I fear—in fact, I am sure—that I have terrible news for you!"

For three ticks of a clock the four of us stood there on the station platform, immovable, grim, stricken, tragic—till a vagrant apprentice porter, wearing a suit of velveteen three sizes too big for him, came up and disturbed us by demanding Sir Michael's "tikkutt!" There was nearly a row when he would not take the Governor's word, and what Sir Michael said to him took off the strain a good deal. However, the station-master came out, and our guide had time to answer the query that burst simultaneously from all our lips, "*Are they dead?*"

"No," said Sir Michael, "but oh" (here he threw up his hands helplessly), "I really cannot break it to you—it is too awful. You must come to the hotel. There you will learn it all too soon for yourselves!"

With awe and fear, with visions of mangled bodies and last dying wishes, we followed Sir Michael to the Annandale Arms of Lockermaben.

The hour was 7.45 p.m. exactly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

STRICKEN HEARTS

But nothing could prepare us for what we actually found.

The Annandale Arms of Lockermaben Town, as distinct from Lockermaben Junction, was a bare, two-storied, barn-like building, with small old windows, the panes of which were covered with the scratchings of diamonds long since gone to the pop-shop—one of which, addressed to the Lockermaben Ladies, contained :—

"The Last Will and Testament of Gentleman Jack—
Heart like an elephant, head like a tack—
Console yourself, ladies—he'll never come back!"

And from his own account—no great loss either!

As we arrived at the door of the private parlour, Sir Michael, who had appeared strangely moved as he came up the village street, pointing out the objects of interest—the town pump, the police-station, the best grocer's shop (a philanthropist who had oysters twice a week), *and* the tobacconist's where there was a pretty girl—suddenly put his hand through the Sergeant's arm and drew him aside.

The effect of this was to introduce us—that is, Jenny and myself, into a big, narrowish room with

a long, oval table, covered with green rep, in the middle. The whole scene is stamped eternally on my memory.

Of course, as you know, Jenny and I had braced up, and got all ready to simulate the great and, indeed, quite unspeakable joy that filled our hearts at the sight of our several betrotheds. You may smile—but it *was* really a noble effort. They may talk of charges and the brave deeds of war. But I tell you there never was a more gallant action, or one more deserving the Victoria Cross than Jenny's and mine that day.

It was a little dark—not real dark, you know, but just duskish in there—what with plants in the window and the lace curtains and the blinds half-down because it was the parish fast-day. Still, in spite of all, I could see Myn standing up with a face like cut chalk, and at the other side of the fireplace a tallish, rather decent-looking limber fellow, dusky like the room, kept pacing to and fro near the window.

"Myn!" I cried, "I have come!"

"Jack!" said Jenny, claiming her property in a low, thrilling footlights' voice, "here I am!" And taking different sides of the table we opened our two pairs of arms. It was our duty, and flinch we would not!

But to my immense surprise Myn did not precipitate herself into my embrace. She looked about—perhaps with shyness, because there was a man in the room—a strange man. Now I knew Myn of old. In those days it was not a little thing like that which would have put her about. Curious to relate, the tall,

dark, West Indian seemed taken the same way. He, also, was coy. He did not flee as a bird (a stork) to Jenny's arms. Somehow the fact of Myn's being there appeared to intimidate him also.

I could not understand it. To make an immense sacrifice, and to then have it fall as flat as ginger-beer two days uncorked—*was* certainly trying! Jenny and I had screwed ourselves up to such a pitch that one turn more would inevitably have sent us *pop*! But here were the two for whose sake we had endured these twenty deaths, and taken at least a hundred cathedral stair consolations, standing before us like a pair of "dumbies"—yes, "dumbies,"—I can use no other word.

But I felt it was my place as a man to put an end to this.

"Myn," I cried, "have you got the licence?"

And Jenny, hearing me, echoed to the address of the West Indian the same question, "And you, Jack, have you got yours?"

Then suddenly the agonised calm of Myn, and of the Image-in-Coffee-Grounds beside her was broken up—like the fountains of a great deep, as my mother says in her Scotch way.

Myn ran forward like the stampede of a herd of cattle. Myn could never do anything calmly all her days.

The wind of her passage sucked the other fellow after her.

"Down on your knees," cried Myn; "we must beseech their pardon. It is our duty. We have done them a great wrong, Jack!"

"Jack! Jack!" cried Jenny and I together, as we started back.

But Myn was grabbing me about the knees—yes, Myn was, and sobbing. The doctor chap in front of Jenny was doing his best to imitate her, but Jenny Sands, with sudden decision and a quicker intuition than I, was telling him to keep his hands off—which he seemed very much relieved indeed to be obliged to do.

"The licence—the three weeks' licence? You have got them?" I repeated mechanically. In such crises the funny thing is that, in spite of yourself, you go on repeating what you have said before.

And Myn, through her sobs, which told me that she was fearfully mad or ashamed or something, kept on saying, "Oh, we had them—yes, Sam—we had them. Oh, I am so ashamed that I cannot tell you what has become of them—you tell them, Jack."

But Jack, looking like an ass (which I found he wasn't) could only gurgle in his throat. If he had spoken at that moment I fear that this work would not have been permitted in nursery libraries, even when put into words of one syllable. So Myn, in her perturbation wiping her eyes with the nearest corner of my travelling overcoat, had perforce to go on herself.

"It was all Jack's fault," she said.

"Jack!" repeated Jenny, with angry emphasis. I never thought Myn would have taken such a tone from anybody. As for its being somebody else's fault than Myn's—I never doubted that. *That* was a foregone conclusion, but I could not see how—this

time. Anyway, the other fellow was having a turn.

Meanwhile, she kept on hugging my knees. It sounds very noble and dramatic, but it was really rather topply. For, you see, I had not had time to lay down my Gladstone bag, and every new access of emotion on Myn's part shook me, like the lusty oak tree when they have got it nearly cut through and make the first haul on the ropes. Jenny had laid her bag on the table and was as dignified and aloof as if she had known everything all along. That's where girls have the advantage—a sort of sixth sense—or seventh, is it? I forget how many there are.

Anyway, Myn did not topple me over quite, though once or twice she came jolly near it. I could see her tears, too, making little pear-shaped splashes on my dusty boots. So I knew she must be pretty mad or disgusted—I guessed that Jack would catch it later, as it seemed to be he who was to blame—or rather, to *be* blamed. No half measures about Myn! She had decided to humiliate herself (I could not think why), and now she was doing it thoroughly and conscientiously. More than that, she was making the West Indian—who, poor fellow, had nothing to do with Myn's megrims—take his furrow also. He did it as if he were playing Mumblety-peg.[1]

[1] Mumblety-peg, probably Mumble-the-peg, a game of forfeit formerly common in the North among boys, in which the victim has to pull with his teeth out of the hard earth of the street, road, or playground, a peg driven deeply in with a mallet. A singular unhappiness generally pervades the Mumblety-pegger's features during the operation.—THE EDITOR.

"Yes; we had the certificates," sobbed Myn, casting a look of scorn at the inarticulate West Indian, "we had them. Uncle Michael will tell you so!"

"So you lost them?" I cried, feeling called upon to make a last sacrifice of nobility. "But don't cry, that doesn't matter!"

"Yes—no—well, not exactly!" Myn was floundering in the uttermost depths, tripping over herself at every stride.

"You lost them," I said more severely, "but now that we are all here, and Sergeant Sands has three more weeks' leave—we can easily wait that time for new ones! We can—can—amuse ourselves!"

At this Myn grabbed me so hard that my Gladstone bag swung round in a complete circle, escaped from my grasp, and went off into space, overturning (of all things in this world) a hotel "whatnot"—with forty-four pictures of relatives of the proprietor all in glass frames, and sixty-three photographs of the tombs of those who were happily dead—the inscriptions being legible on every one—that is, before the accident. But all this did not stop Myn, and Sir Michael was on guard at the door. I could hear him arguing with the landlady, who, hearing the crash, had got the idea into her head that we were dynamitards. He made himself responsible for the damage, and the landlady retired.

Myn stopped. I question if several earthquakes and a bombardment would have shifted Myn with her story half told.

"Oh, Sam," she cried, "I know—I know you

can never forgive us—*me*—I mean. I have said so all along. But Jack was so overbearing. He said—oh, he said a lot of things—under the trees, in the orchards, and especially when we went to gather hazel-nuts. It was that which brought it to a head—those hazel-nuts, I mean. They really ought not to be allowed. And he said—Jack said——"

"Who is Jack?" I cried severely. "I thought you were engaged to me?" And at that Myn grabbed me again, but I had a better purchase now and no Gladstone bag. So I stood the strain.

"Didn't I tell you?" Myn cried to the West Indian doctor (and if ever you saw a disgusted man, he was him), "didn't I tell you, Jack, how they would take it?"

"Oh, yes, you certainly did!" growled the doctor, "but—by Hang[1]—by Hang, this is ten thousand times worse—how much longer is it going to go on?—Oh Hang, tell them, and be done with it! Or by Hang——!"

"Hush," said Myn, "I will! Sam Brown, and you, Jenny Sands, you have been cruelly wronged—yes, most cruelly? And by those who ought to have had your best interests at heart. But, oh Sam—if you have any spark of forgiveness——!"

I had, but at that moment I caught one glimpse of Jenny's face, and got notice to freeze it up. We were stern as so many Brutuses (if that is the proper English plural) or Rhadamanthi—or any other old frost-bound classic thing you can think of. We were like the Russian Empire in winter—not one

[1] Hang!—a West Indian deity—much quoted by residents.

ice-free port! Our hearts were bitter, and frozen, and stony as all Siberia. Jenny saw farther than I did, and made it so.

"Oh Sam, Sam," continued Myn, "think of our partnership—of the stamps—of all we have been to each other——!"

"The licences!" I repeated sternly, not knowing what else to say, "the licences!"

"Oh Sam, we had them, we had them! But you were so long in coming. And Jack got fond of me—I told him he oughtn't. Oh, a hundred times! But I am only a poor weak girl—you know that, Sam. How could I stand against a man like that? And he said that the licences would be spoilt if not used. So—oh, Sam, Sam—how am I to tell you—WE GOT MARRIED!"

I cast Myn off, unclasping her hands with that slow, fateful calm which showed that my heart was dead within me. Jenny was leaning against the mantelpiece, her hands clasped across her breast and her eyes on the ceiling. And the West Indian—well, he looked the last—the very meanest of mortal men. No married M.D. ever looked less proud of himself.

On the whole we did it rather well. Only I wished that Myn would get up. I was getting regular cramped. Did you ever have your knees hugged for long at a time? Well, take my advice. If anybody ever starts in to do it—no matter how good and brave it makes you feel, and how wicked and debased they say they are—you take my advice and raise them, with a noble action full of true dignity and forgiveness, to their feet.

The other way may be gratifying to your pride, but after the first five minutes, you will find it wearing—especially during the long speeches. Myn was death on long speeches. *Now*, at anyrate. She didn't use to be. But meeting that West Indian had changed her somehow—I saw about a score of Green Books scattered about, all with places marked in them with little slips of torn letters and the edges of journals.

Then with a slow, unanimous, retrograde movement, Jenny and I put the faithless at a distance from us. We didn't say, "Avaunt! Stand off!" Or anything like that, because, nowadays, speeches of that sort sound as if you were making fun. And this was deadly earnest to Myn, whatever it was to the West Indian.

We only fell back, me round my side of the table covered with green rep, and Jenny round hers. Now, if two people follow the circumference of a circle in opposite directions, they will meet. They are bound to. This is mathematics. My cousin Jim (who is a don at it and examiner in that science) says that it is so. You had better believe him.

He also says, "If you don't believe, *solvitur ambulando*," which means "Walk it and see!" That is, at anyrate, what Jenny and I did.

We bumped into each other at the table foot—all our hopes completely shattered—and our heads nearly so, for we were going fast and not looking. We had turned our backs on the perjured ones. We had left them standing like statues, and their consciences (very properly) playing the old Harry with them

inside. But we—Jenny and I—what was there left for us—save only to mingle our tears?

Ah, you despised, forsaken, deceived—there is still this refuge left for you. Pick out some nice-looking person of the opposite sex, similarly afflicted, and *mingle your tears*! Mind what I tell you. Take a lesson from Jenny and me. I sobbed on Jenny's autumn-leaf-hat—chosen with wonderful foresight, and the sight of whose withered petals and fallen leaves seemed to bring everything back again from the dead past. As for Jenny, she wept unrestrainedly on my coat-collar, hardly yet dry from the tunnel and places.

Of course it was Joy—oh, great Joy that made us do it. But do you think we were going to be so soft as to let the deceivers know it. Not us! I took my cue from Jenny, and I bet we worked the mill.

Come to think of it—though a decided relief, it was a deuced mean thing of them to do, thus to take advantage of the innocent and the absent—of Jenny and me, that is.

"*Can't* you forgive us—just one little word of consolation—of forgiveness?" cried Myn, "not to me—not to your old 'Co.'?"

Being soft-hearted I would, but Jenny was inflexible. So we turned from them with stern, pale faces—or at least as stern and pale as we could make them. This is the recipe. Grit your teeth and stick out your under-jaw—like Mr Robert Forbeson when he looks most like Dante! That's the idea. And with a little imagination, you'll see how well it works. But at the door I heard Myn sobbing—of course, it

was only temper, I knew that. Still, I couldn't stand it. She had been my "Co." so long, though, in the end, she—well, you have heard what she had done!—in fact, she had nearly tugged my legs in two telling me!

So, looking back, I said, pushing out my palm as if the words were too much for me—

"*To-morrow—to-morrow*!"

It sounded just awfully impressive, spoken like that—like the Ghost of Gawaine blown along a wandering wind! That sort of thing.

But there was kindness in my voice, and Myn, recognising it, reached out her hands and said, "Thank you, Sam—thank you!"

CHAPTER XXIX

REVENGE IS SWEET—FOR ONCE !

We went out. What Jenny and I wanted was a place to dance in. But Sir Michael was on the stairs, shaking as if it was his first day of cold ague. We waved him away. He meant well, but it would have spoiled the effect. Besides, there is a still, stern dignity about the sorrow of stricken hearts into which no stranger, even an uncle of the traitress, can be allowed to intrude.

We must have been pretty impressing. For even the rustling, black-silky landlady of the Annandale let us pass out without a word, which is far from being her custom. As we went down the street together, alone in a lonely world, we awed the very passers-by. The scavenger leaned on his broom and gazed. The message boys stopped with the most urgent commands and gaped open-mouthed. (It was the only way they could gape—but this is descriptive writing.) The effect was positively stupendous, and it was not till we met Sergeant Sands that I discovered that in my hurry of departure I had put on Sir Michael's hat !

But still, thus to impress the community of Lockermaben with astonishment, in spite of such a

superficial disadvantage—well, that was something at anyrate.

The Sergeant had just come from the police-station, where he had reported himself, and from which he had, as a distinguished stranger, been directed to the best lodgings in the town. We went there, and the Sergeant, without asking for the least information (which, no doubt, he had got from the Chief Constable or Sir Michael), left us to ourselves.

Well, I have done pretty fairly up till now, in my efforts to depict our feelings as we went along—fairly, that is, for a pupil teacher. But this scene, I fear, will beat me. However I will just put down what happened.

Mr Sands—we had resolved (that is, *he* had) to drop the "Sergeant" in Lockermaben society—had already sent out the landlady to the "shops" to get something for dinner. And for Mr Sands, after all the emotions of the day—which, I must say, he had supported with commendable firmness, being, no doubt, accustomed to murder and suicide cases as part of his daily profession—he no doubt felt the need of "a whiff or two." He would, he said, step down to the Chief Constable's and talk a little "shop!"

Good fellow, the Sergeant!

Jenny and I were therefore alone till the landlady should come in. And even then she would, of course, be in the kitchen till she came to lay the cloth.

There was a table also in that room. It, too, was covered with green rep. I never saw such a place as Lockermaben for green rep! Somebody must have cleared out a heap of damaged stock there, and retired

with a pile. But at anyrate, Jenny, who was all alive with suppressed emotion, pushed the table out of the way so quick that I was afraid it would go bang into the midst of a large photograph group of the plainest people in the world—doubtless our present landlady's relations. Some of them would have been done to powder—ground, I mean—if it had not been for the antimacassars on a chair half way back, which toppled over under the energetic impact of the table.

Then Jenny held out her hands and I held out mine. We laughed and cried both at once. Oh, yes, you can—that's all *you* know. At least we could and did. I suppose we kissed one another, but things got so mixed and shifting that I forget exactly what happened—or at least in what order.

What I do remember is that when we came to ourselves Jenny Sands and I were dancing—waltzing, that is, like fun. I wasn't much good at it, but Jenny waltzed for two, pulling me round. And as for me, I put so much energy into it that the butcher below sent up a message to ask us to trip it more lightly. He was a sympathetic man of the name of M'Todd. But to dance down two hung sheep and a leg of beef all in five minutes was too much even for a M'Todd. However, he bore no malice, because our landlady dealt at his shop. Moderation in all things was what he advised.

After that we settled down, Jenny and I. I think I mentioned that there was only one large and comfortable chair in these lodgings. Well, if I did not, the fact was so. The Sergeant would, of course, annex it to smoke in, but in the meantime—well, I

need not enlarge. That is what such things are for. For the Sergeant, I mean.

We said we would discuss our future.

That is what Jenny called it. But the discussion was rather intermittent, like West Indian fever. I did not make this comparison aloud, because it is most likely incorrect. *I* am not a cigar-coloured Windward Island doctor to know all about such things.

Our future! The very words made something "bump" up against your heart—not beat, you know, but "bump" up suddenly with a feeling of pleasant emptiness. I never knew Jenny's hair smelled so nice. So did her lips. So did Jenny herself! Rum thing—I began to count the days till we could get out new certificates for the two of us. Of course I had my East Dene ones all right—my papers, I mean. But Jenny would have to live three weeks so as to qualify. For that thoughtless wretch of a West Indian had used up hers on Myn—who really didn't need them, having a set of her own. Clearly there was evidence of arrant waste somewhere.

Well, three weeks was a long time. Though if only Sergeant Sands had stayed away, and we had had the tenure of that single arm-chair, it would not have been quite unbearable. Of course, there was the dinner and the landlady, but at that moment I did not feel that we should ever want anything to eat again!

Our misfortunes had taken away our appetites. That is often the case at first. Afterwards it is different.

"No," said Jenny, recovering first and smoothing herself generally, "be sensible! Oh Sam—Sam!"

She clapped her hands joyously—and for the space of five minutes she was anything but sensible herself. I was guilty of aiding and abetting. I own it. But it was really the chair's fault. It was really the most entrancing chair—for the Sergeant smoking in—that ever was seen. He said so himself frequently afterwards.

"Oh, it *can't* be true! It can't—It can't! It is too good!"

Whereupon I produced arguments to prove that it *was* true, and that there were reasons for thinking that there was still better to come.

"Oh, Sam," Jenny added, attempting to throttle me with a quick nervous hug, apparently adapted from her father's method of securing burglars, "we don't deserve it!"

To this I had nothing to say—I only told her to bear up! All I could suggest in addition was that at anyrate *we* were not to blame. If Myn and Dr Jack cared to disgrace themselves by going and getting married on the sly, that was nobody's fault but their own. It was not ours anyway. We were the jilted ones!

Jenny jerked herself bolt upright at the word.

"Me jilted! Oh, what would they say at the School of Music?"

"They won't say anything," I argued, "we will only own to having run off together—and uppress the ignoble fact that your father ran off with us. Then we will receive universal consideration and sympathy! You'll see!"

Jenny nodded. She knew her world.

"Yes, that is true," she said, "but that involves gettingmarried. I thoughtyou said you had objections —conscientious objections—to being married!"

"I never meant *you*, Jenny," I explained. "I have always remembered that last day at Greenwich, and your going away with your handkerchief to your eyes."

"Don't speak of it—it is too horrid! That old boat—and you and Myn spooning all the way home! You did—I watched you!"

I denied, because I was a man. Jenny believed me because she was a woman.

After a while she said, her light breathing tickling the short hairs of my neck a little aft my ear, "Sam, do you *really* want to get married?"

Of course I said "Yes!" For "circumstances alter cases," as the Prime Minister always says, when asked to explain the speeches he made as Leader of the Opposition.

"Well!" she murmured very softly, regularly making me "squinge" by going on breathing in the same place—there or thereabouts. (Boys, don't you ever let girls do that—they always mean coaxing to let them have their own way!)

"Well, what?" I said.

"Well," whispered Jenny, still tickling softly, enough to curl a fellow up, "if you do want to get married, why don't you ask—*some* girl, eh, Sam?"

I thought she couldn't have been fetched any closer, but she was. I fetched her. I am awful strong at times.

"Jenny," I said, "you know—you have known all along!"

"Known what?" says she, still mousing.

"That I love you!"

Oh, the shame of me—Sam Brown, saying these words, and really meaning them.

"Oh, *that*!" said Jenny, carelessly. (I wish she would leave my neck alone. It was as bad as getting your hair cut by a careless barber). "Yes, I know that, of course. You love me. But then—you have never asked me to—to marry you! There, it's out!"

"Well, I do now."

"Do it then!"

"Jenny, will you marry me?" I got the words out. It was pretty gulpy though.

"You are sure it isn't out of spite because Myn went and got married, or out of pity because Jack Haslip jilted me?"

I swore the biggest and most binding oath I knew or could invent on the spur of the moment.

"Nor yet because it seems the natural revenge on the others?"

"No," I cried, getting tired and a little edgy, "why, you know yourself—all those cathedral stairs ——"

"*Dear* cathedrals—I think we must join the Church of England," said Jenny, suddenly softening her tone.

"I have always thought it the nicest religion," I said. And in fact on this occasion it had my approval, though really, you know, I thought mother's had more grip on what she called the "Fundamentals."

"Well, why do you want to marry me, after all you said against getting married?" Jenny was persistent. Perhaps because she had found a little dimple and stayed there.

I dropped my head against her face pretty hard to stop the tickling, and simply said what was true, "Because I love you, Jenny!"

. . . . . .

"Ah!" she sighed. And lay a long time quiet in my arms, all soft and warm, and quite content. I made no objections.

CHAPTER XXX

THE END OF "MEE & MYN, LIMITED."

THAT evening we ate little. Jenny and I played dummy whist with the Sergeant, till her father said that he would as soon play with three dummies—including, along with the ordinary ones, the poker and the tongs. But this was really Jenny's fault, because she would not keep her feet to herself, and so disturbed my play. They were nice enough feet. And at another time I would not have complained. But the Sergeant sent us off to bed. I was to sleep across the road, as there were only two rooms to be got in the house. But we managed to say good-night all right. He was grumpy but not revengeful, the Sergeant, and we certainly had played abominably.

The next day we had to go and break our great news to the happy bride and bridegroom. We had resolved to give them a time. We would make them sit up for all that they had made us suffer. Father, Jenny's father, I mean, was to open the ball. We had taken him so far into our secrets. But I guess he knew them pretty well before. Also he had a face like a wall, and could be trusted. It was to be a gay time, that morning visit to the Annandale Arms.

So it would have been—but for Jenny Sands.

. . . . . .

"I couldn't help it, Sam," she confessed to me next morning; "the poor things! They behaved badly, of course, but perhaps so would we if we had had the chance."

"What chance?" I demanded.

"Well, the papers all signed and everything waiting," she said, settling a crimson bow that she wore on her shoulder. She had a blouse that buttoned up at the side with little coral buttons—pretty as jewels.

Then she looked at me funnily—yet it wasn't funny either, strictly speaking—because something in her eyes thrilled you as if you had knocked your funny-bone.

Says she, "Sam, if we had had *our* papers and there had been a parson to marry us when we came down the last of those cathedral stairs, *I* wouldn't have said no!"

I had to thank her for this, which I did with a certain *empressement.*

"Would you, Sam?" said she, poking her face up to mine.

Of course, put to a fellow like that, he had to say the same as Jenny said. Only she didn't *make* you say it, like Myn. You wanted to say it. That was the difference.

"Well, then," said Jenny, "of course there was no good making the poor things more unhappy. Besides, now, Myn was a married woman. It was obviously wrong for you to think of her any more—even a little. Same with Jack and me. The sooner it was all over and done with the better. So I waited till father was safe in the office of the Chief of Police. I kept near

the window till I heard the 'cloop' of a bottle—Scotch ginger-beer, of course—that's the only thing they drink at police-stations. Then I just pelted for the hotel—the Annandale Arms, you know—and ran right into Sir Michael, who was doing a kind of amateur sentry-go before the door.

"At first I had some difficulty in persuading him that I did not mean to murder the lot. But as soon as he could be got to believe that I had no intentions of an evil kind—no concealed knives or revolvers, he let me go up.

"Well, Myn was sitting reading at one end of the green rep table, at least a book was open before her. She was not looking at it, and she seemed pretty doleful. Jack had been trying to cheer her up, but was making poor success. When she saw me, Millicent rose to her feet, and laid her hand on her heart with one of her grand actions. You know! But she was not acting this time. She knew it was all pretty mean—what the two of them had done—considered by it itself, that is, and as far as they knew!"

"Jenny," I interrupted, "I hope that you did not tell them!"

"Please, hush!" she said, "I have listened to heaps of your stories, Sam Brown, and if things turn out as we expect, I shall have to hear the same ones a good many times over. So let me tell this one which is my own! Don't interrupt."

Now this was pretty severe for Jenny Sands, though mere butterfly-down compared to Myn's tongue when she got after you. Still, it was the right thing, and I did not again say a word. She went on—

"So I said to Jack and Sir Michael who had followed me up, 'I want you two men to go away. I have something to say to Millicent. I have a right to say it!'

"The men looked at each other—not yet very certain about me. But Myn bowed her head like a true Hallamshire Sykes, gentle and dignified.

"'Go,' she said, 'she has the right.'

"Then when they had gone downstairs I opened my arms to Myn, and after she had stood a moment sort of dazed, she came right at me. She is nearly half-a-head taller than I am, but she seemed little just then because her eyes were pitiful and full of tears.

"But I just said, 'You dear!'

"Yes, that and nothing more! And after that she took me in her arms and cried over me, and said she was not fit to live and so on. Well, that's nobody's business but ours.

"So I sat her down on the sofa, and took her hands and said, 'Millicent Sykes—I mean—Haslip, look at me——'

"And she looked.

"'Do I look like a desolate Ophelia—do I look in the depths of despair—forsaken—as if you would find me in the Annan Water to-morrow, with a sweet, resigned smile on my face and a little green weed in my hair?'

"'No,' she said doubtfully, 'you have been very brave. You have done it for our sakes—I understand that—we shall never forget it——!'

"She stopped herself on the verge of saying 'Jack and I!' because she thought what old and tender

memories the words might reawaken. Now, till he came across this time, I had not seen Jack for half-a-dozen years, and then I liked him because he gave me swings and took me to the Zoo!

"'Well,' said I to Myn, 'how do you find Sam—bearing up too—for your sake and Jack's?'

"I suppose I must have looked pretty mischievous. For Myn got up suddenly, seized me by both my shoulders, and cried out two words.

"'YOU BRATS!'

"That was what she said, and she actually shook me. Hard too!"

I nodded. I knew Myn.

"'Well I *never*—in all my life—you *wretches*!'

"And Myn shook me again.

"Then she asked me if I had cared about you long. I said, 'Oh, a good while!'

"At this she laughed and laughed till I had to stop her by telling her that, after all, though we did love one another—because we couldn't help it—there *was* a difference. Sam Brown and I had come there to Lockermaben prepared to fulfil our promises whatever it cost, and that she must not forget that.

"This sobered her a good deal, and she said, 'Yes, of course, we were horrid to you, and you were noble. Nobler than ever, if you really loved one another, like Jack and me.'

"It sounded so funny and so relieving to hear her say, 'Jack and me,' turning it over with her tongue as if she had had a piece of Fuller's candy in her mouth—Myn, who always looked as if she would cuff any man who spoke to her. I near choked.

"'Jack and me,' she said, as proud and self-conscious as a canary before a mirror, with a pink bow round its neck, and a Union Jack tied to its tail.

"Then I told Myn how we had made it up to get married as soon as we could. And how I was going to go on with my music, and perhaps make some money by singing at concerts. (I am, you know, Sam. What?—Did I forget to mention that to you? Well, I am, anyway.)

"And Myn said that she and Jack were to sail for the West Indies, though not quite so soon as they had expected. Her father having been informed (after the event) had given his consent on the solicitation of his brother Michael. They were all going to Old Phil's marriage at Cadmon's Cove. Would we not come too? It would be quite a family gathering!

"But I told her that you and I, Sam, were better in our own rank, and that after the stamps were divided, we would start afresh——

"You should have seen Myn jump, when I said that. It was famous, and I did it on purpose.

"'Oh, how could you be so cruel?' she cried; 'of course Sam is to have all the stamps, and the shop and everything! He can keep the old name if he likes—Mee & Myn, Limited.'

"But I drew the line at that. If any silly name like that had to be used it would have to be 'Mee & Jenny, Unlimited,' for the future. I told Myn this, and, after a moment, she said it was all right. It was just and proper that I should feel like that. She would have felt the same about Jack.

"Then she heard the two men on the stairs talk-

ing. I think they had been hovering uncomfortably about, waiting for a pistol shot or something unpleasant. Men read so many nasty papers that they always think the worst is going to happen. Hearing them, Myn made one rush for the door, overturning a chair, and calling out, 'Jack—Jack, come here quick!

"And he was up in three jumps—maybe two and a stumble.

"'Oh, Jack,' she cried, 'such news—they are going to be happy like us. They are going to be married!'

"'Who?' demanded Dr Jack, with great amazement.

"'Why, Sam and Jenny, of course!'

"'Oh!' he said, very cut and dried."

And Jenny added pensively, "Do you know, he never even congratulated me? What do you suppose he meant by it?"

I did not tell Jenny, though I knew that it was because he was a man, and a man can never forgive a girl who has once been engaged to him, for going farther and faring better.

. . . . .

All this Jenny told me the next morning. She outlined it also to her father on our way to the Annandale Arms.

"It strikes me that there is not much more to say," remarked that sage. And emptied the dottle out of his pipe on to the palm of his hand.

Nor, as it happened, was there. For when we got to the hotel, there was a letter waiting us from the

Governor of the Windward Islands, saying that he and Dr John Haslip had been recalled suddenly, and that it was decided that Mrs Haslip should accompany them. There would just be time to attend his brother's wedding to Mrs Egerton Greatorix. But they had to leave by the first train, and hoped that we would excuse them.

There was a little note to me from Myn.

"I hope you will be as happy as I am—Jenny is ever so much nicer than I ever will be. Keep on loving her, but send a thought across seas sometimes to greet your old friend and affectionate partner, MYN."

Dr Jack sent no word.

Then we had a serious talk, sitting on the bridge over the Annan Water, and it was there that Sergeant Sands said, "See here, Sam Brown, I said I would give you my daughter. But I did not mean to give her to you quite empty-handed. I have six thousand pounds that can go into the business. You let your mother carry on the East Dene work, and do you come up to London. There are lots of openings there. I have been looking out. Go where the money is. Open neat little shops, properly looked after, in the well-to-do suburbs, at the big watering-places, wherever people lounge along with hands in their pockets, and wonder what to do with their money. You must live in London and superintend. If you don't care to live with us (and personally I don't believe in that arrangement for a young wife), there is a nice little house out Blackheath way which would suit you famously."

"Oh, father," said Jenny, and hugged him. "Call him father too, Sam," she commanded. And I did.

But Sergeant Sands disengaged himself from his daughter and put on a stern air.

"There is, however, one thing I must insist upon," he said, "and I forewarn you that I will stand no nonsense about it!"

Jenny and I both looked a little aghast. I had heard and read about stern parents and settlements and things. Jenny did not quake nearly so much, knowing her father. At least, she says so now.

"Wha—what is it?" I faltered, trying to meet his eye—either of them.

"It is the name of the firm," he said, "I won't have any more of that foolishness—'Mee & Myn, Limited.' I am not sure if it is even legal. Are you registered?"

I said certainly. We registered all our stamp letters. It was a practice of our office.

"No, no," said the Sergeant, "I mean are you registered under the Companies Act?"

I shook my head sadly. I did not know what he was talking about.

"Well," he said gravely, "I am not sure whether I am not compounding a serious felony—falsification of trademarks and so on——"

Jenny, seeing my anxious face, came over to me and put her arm through mine.

"Don't mind him, Sam," she said, "it's only father!"

"Ungrateful child," said Sergeant Sands, "taking a

stranger's part against him to whose declining years you ought to be the staff and stay!—Learn, Janet Sands, that I insist on the name and style of the firm being immediately changed—yes, *im*mediately."

"And what do you propose, sir?" I cried, very anxious to please.

"Why," said the Sergeant, "since I am taking a hand in this affair—giving you my daughter and some little capital, what have you say—against——"

He paused a long minute, leaving us in suspense. Then he added—

"MESSRS SAM BROWN, SANDS & CO."

"But why 'Co.'?" cried Jenny and I together.

"Ah!" said the Sergeant, with that air of infinitely grave wisdom which became him so well.

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